THE SWORD OF SHINTO by SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL

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Adventure

GORDON MacCREAGH

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FEB. 1946

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Adventure

(Registered U. S. Patent Office)

Vol. 114, No. 4 for **February, 1946** **Best of New Stories**

NOVELETTES

The Sword of Shinto.....SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL 6

Though Nippon now is conquered there still lurk among the atom-bomb-pitted wastes that once were cities sullen die-hard fanatics who conspire to carry on a hateful lost cause. And where the uninitiate forces of occupation see only evidence of cooperation with the *Amerika-jin*, or hear naught but the mumbling of priestly prayers from a Shinto shrine, Lew Davies' keen ears discern the whetting of a sword. And why shouldn't he spot chicanery among the cherry blossoms? Hadn't he, masquerading as Koropok, the pariah Ainu, sweated out the war in the very heart of Japland—and learned by bitter experience that every smile on those yellow faces was nothing but veneer for venom?

The Old Oil.....GORDON MacCREAGH 46

When a petroleum pipeline has to run across the territory of three Mid-East governments, plus a couple of "spheres of influence" jealously watched by the wiliest brains in Islam, it takes guts as well as an unlimited expense account to sew up the concession. It was lucky Mike McIlvain had both—as well as a gun, a knife and a sixth sense for danger.

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The Betrayal of Bulkhead Bean.....ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN 32

Captain Bean had been trading among the islands for a good many years and had encountered more than one skipper's share of eccentric beachcombers but he'd never met a character to match Jeremiah Van Martin "late of the Sidney bar." And never, never had he been so bamboozled on all counts. He should have listened to his mate and simply handed the legal gent a bottle of squareface and tossed him over the rail. That's always a safe thing to do when perfect strangers insist on making your fortune for you.

Charlie Lynxear and the Law.....KERN L. PERC 43

Folks at Bedrock Crossing claimed they'd never seen Old Charlie smile. I did—twice. Once the day we found Joe Anders' body; and the second time the day Buck Beasley was hanged. Bloodthirsty? Hell, no! Charlie was the kindest old coot that ever bucked a blizzard along his trapline.

Jebediah and the Saint.....NARD JONES 68

It behooves any rural mail carrier to get along with the dogs in the neighborhood but Jeb and The Saint—Nels Nelson's St. Bernard—hit it off too well, you might say. At least the dog liked Jeb. What the postman thought about The Saint was something else again.

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BE OUT ON FEBRUARY 8TH ◆ ◆ ◆

Adam Was a Chump..... COLEMAN MEYER 76
Smoky Bill Holman had always entertained a private suspicion that his first ancestor should have hung on to that extra rib. Then, one day, up to his pit at the racetrack in a brand-new Miller drove Christopher Oscar Benchley to prove how right he'd been all these years. Now Bill has a ragged finger to remind him every time a skirt passes by and Benchley—Well, that's another story.

Hunters' Moon..... T. F. TRACY 84
All of General Marion's men were hungry and as they rode through the Carolina night on the trail of Tarleton's dragoons the talk was all of food—barbecued beef, pork roast, venison pot pie. Captain Baxter's favorite obsession was ham. He even dreamed about it. Then, suddenly, the crackle of British musketry ahead and there was the provision train of the enemy for the taking. What did it matter if the ragged Continentals were outnumbered twenty to one? They were famished weren't they—their bellies had to be filled—and wasn't that a hunters' moon above?

The Kunming Story..... JAMES ATLEE PHILLIPS 120
"Have I got a yarn!" the big, blond, heroic-looking correspondent said excitedly. "This is off the ice and you could ruin me with a whisper." I gulped a spoonful of shark's fin soup. "Tell me about it," I said. And there in that curtained booth in Kunming he dragged his knowing fingers across the heartstrings of the inexplicable East. Just as though I hadn't been in China myself—too long! But the soup was superb.

THE SERIAL

Chains for Columbus (4th of 5 parts)..... ALFRED POWERS 94
To the haunted city of Toltepec come young Francisco Perez and his brutal captor, Zorilla, to forget their personal hatreds for a while as they wade, waist-deep, in the accumulated treasures of forgotten Aztec kings. Then, suddenly, the chains are broken and Perez finds himself—though freed of his fetters—another kind of prisoner in a strange, serpent-infested alien land.

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Money's what you can do with it—and when General Villa's banknotes could buy the finest meal in Juarez why should his army kick—even though it wasn't worth the paper it was printed on?

Rip-Snortin' Mountain Man..... C. W. CHAMBERLAIN 125
He could make a saddle, snowshoes, bull boat or canoe. He could mend a gun, dress game, built a fort and defend it, break a horse, cut sign, read smoke signals and think like an Injun, shoot the buttons off your coat at five hundred yards and lick anything on two or four legs. Meet Ol' Bill Williams—giant of a breed of giants.

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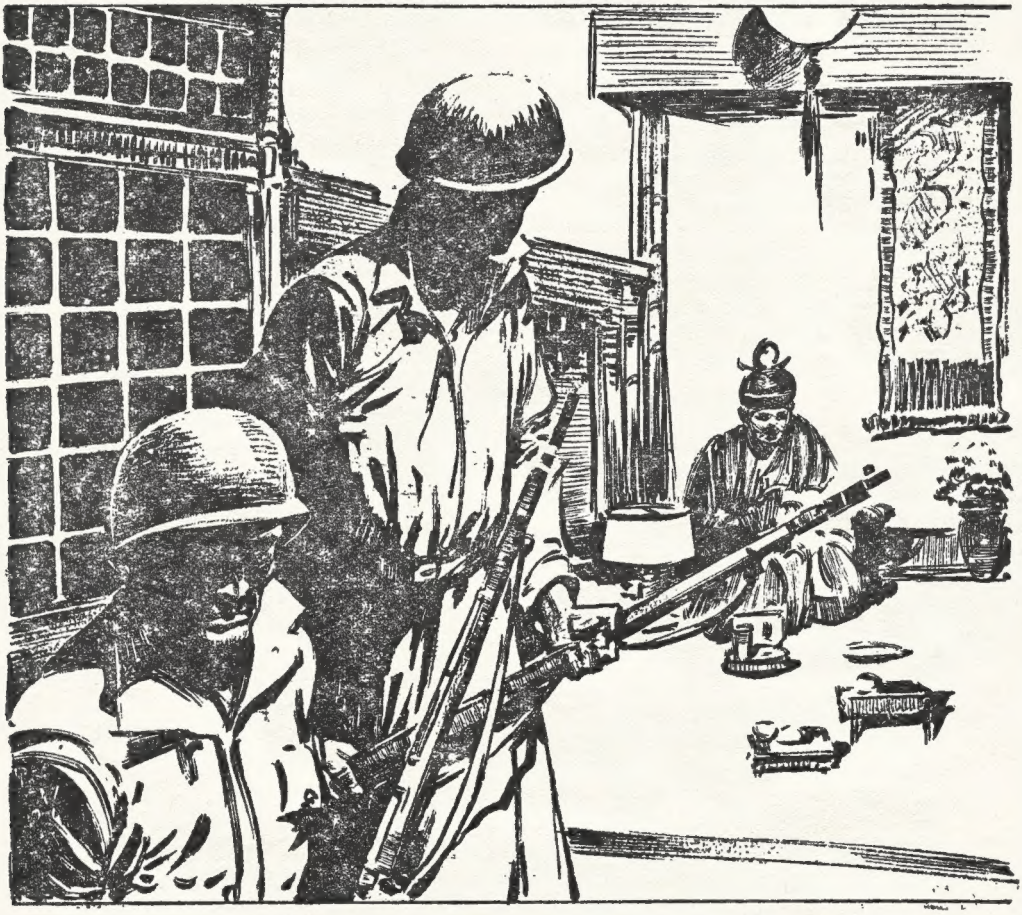
Kenneth S. White, Editor

THE SWORD



IT WAS so still and cold that the water in the bronze font which had stood for centuries in the paved, empty courtyard of the Shinto shrine had become a block of ice long before midnight. The night was one of enormous white stars and almost no shadow. There was no moon.

The ice, even with Tokyo's winter starlight glistening on its surface, had no real color of ice at all. It was brown, like the color of long dead *mitsu-aoi* leaves, those leaves of the wild ginger which, when pointed inward, were used by a fierce samurai family as a crest.

No paunched and black-robed Shinto priest shuffled out from the sleeping quarter to chip away the ice block and refill the container with the water which should be used by devout or boastful or fearful Japanese in the age-old ceremony of purifying their bodies in the sight of their ancestors and the gods. No worshipers were expected. There had been no lack of them before, not since the day when a short dagger was first thrust into the ground and, along with the hand which wielded it, buried where the shrine was to be built.

The dagger and hand thus became the first

OF SHINTO

By
SIDNEY
HERSCHEL
SMALL

The two infantrymen stared at the sprawled body on the matting. "Gutted himself," one soldier said to the other.

ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK KRAMER

offering made to the god of war; a good many offerings had been made since that time.

Perhaps the lack of worshipers was why the fat and warm Shinto priests remained comfortably in their quilts. On this night there was no chance of their being awakened by the sound of shrill bells carried by the worshipers who raced through the streets to receive purification at the shrine. Once these *hadakamairi* had run naked, in order that weaker persons could admire their physical strength. As years passed, and the new century began, they covered themselves with thin white kimonos, to

satisfy the stupid authorities, but neglected to belt the light fabric about their middles. The *hadakamairi* continued to carry bells, but these were intended to warn those weaklings who could not look upon strength, and admire it, to turn their heads away.

Now, the streets of their own city, the capital of Japan, were forbidden to all Japanese after dark. Men could not be purified, at a time when purification was needed. In addition, the war god went unworshiped during the hours of night when prayers could arise where the sword-edge of the moon cut a hole in the skies. No soldiers could come to the shrine, nor sailors, nor merchants who had prayed for a continuation of the profits coming from conquered lands, nor women praying for strength for their husbands and sons in combat, so that their men would find the enemy weak.

Never had purification been so desperately needed. Japan had been disgraced, humbled, and defeated completely for the first time in all Nipponese history . . . and by the despised *Amerika-jin*, the weak ones, the cowards.

What must the gods be thinking? What must the god of this temple, the angry-faced god of war, be thinking?

And why had not the sacred *shintai*, the object for veneration of the god, not already leaped from the earth, in the hand of the hero who had sacrificed hand and dagger, and driven the accursed Americans from Japan? Where were the *Ika-dzuchi*, the dread ghostly warriors who had been generated from the putrefying corpse of the husband of the sun-goddess herself?

Perhaps this was what the priests were discussing in the sleeping quarters. A dagger was mentioned in what they whispered together while they stuffed their bellies with midnight rice and pickled egg-plant; a dagger, but not a hand.

Any of them would gladly have thrust one of the shrine's many knife-*shintai* into the backs of the two American infantrymen on guard in the courtyard. *Ai-ya!* Oh, no more fat and beautiful days for the Shinto priests, warm here in winter, and cool, at some seaside shrine, in summer.

No more succulent little lobsters whose scarlet claws could be sucked on while reciting prayers. No more delicately flavored raw fish so thinly cut that the light could be seen through the pale slices when held up before a lamp. No more slender young maids sent from Siam and Indo-China to serve in the shrine after they had already properly served the glorious heroes of the army, the true worshipers of the war god. And no more opportunities to observe what prison camp commanders did, so delightfully, to captured *Amerika-jin* soldiers who arrogantly refused to bow and to answer questions.

Instead, as if the Americans who had tricked Japan into defeat by something which the priests did not understand, were not in themselves evil enough, the Americans were permitting a plague of ascetic Buddhists to leave the prisons, fools who had been jailed for not praising the glories of war. The Shinto priests hated these men as venomously as they hated the Americans, as greatly as they hated Japanese who had accepted a cowardly religion which worshiped a carpenter-god and peace, and almost as greatly as they hated defeat.

Shinto was hate.

But the priests intended to do more than hate, and were whispering about this in the sleeping quarter. *Jigoku no sata mo, kana shidai*: even hell's judgments could be swayed by money, and the shrine was a wealthy one. Money bought what men desired. It could buy swords and daggers. It had bought one of the latter, a thin *wakizashi*, because if one of the shrine's dagger-*shintai* were employed in killing, the blade might be traced back to the shrine.

A dagger was being discussed, in the warmth of the sleeping quarter, while the two infantrymen walked their cold, lonely posts along the edge of the courtyard. A dagger. And a head which had been hacked from a neck.

The head was in the block of ice.

"HOTOKE no k'o mo san-do," announced the head priest, a man as ponderous as a Japanese wrestler, and with a face just as gross. "We will not be crushed. We are supposed to be worms, but we have became snakes. Our efforts," he said solemnly, puffing out his thick lips, "are blessed in the sight of the gods. It is a great and noble service."

A younger priest said, "Nor will the stupid *Amerika-jin* realize what we are doing. If they come . . . here we are. At prayers."

"How long will it be before Kokochuji is missed?" asked another subordinate, reaching for a fat Egyptian cigarette which had come from Singapore. His fingers shook slightly as he picked up a coal from the brazier and lit the cigarette. "It is certain," he continued, "that the *Amerika-jin* will come here, when Kokochuji's head is discovered, and then we will be questioned."

Tadami-uchi, the head priest, took the cigarette from the other, and drew in a great breath of smoke before replying.

"You have not studied carefully," he chided, chuckling. "Do you not remember your lessons? *'Todai moto kurashi.'* Below the candlestick is the darkest place in the world. The head is here, in our font of purification. Would *we*, if we had done the deed which separated it from the neck, have placed it here? No! The Americans will reason so."

"We will be questioned," the younger priest muttered.

"Assuredly. We know nothing. We have faithfully, according to orders, remained within the sleeping quarter. The soldiers—out in the cold!—will truthfully state that they have not seen us in the courtyard."

"But we will be questioned."

"Yes. With words. The *Amerika-jin* do not torture to discover truth. We can lie safely, laughing to ourselves as we do so, because there will be no filling-belly-with water, or" —he put the glowing end of the cigarette near his flaring nostrils—"other little pleasantries which we invented. And the Americans say we can invent nothing! *Mah!* Who invented the Divine-Wind airplanes? Who invented the defenses-of-caves? Who invented the glories of war?"

The youngest of the priests asked respectfully, "Oh, lord, how could the devils we hate have found a way to open the heavens so that the thunder and lightning could come down, destroying two entire cities? How—"

"That was not done by the *Amerika-jin*," growled the head priest. "It was caused by lack of prayers to the war god, who in his anger wiped out the cities. That is the truth. I learned it while I was at prayer."

"But—"

The head priest snarled, "Doubts? You will not sleep tonight. You will pray. For doubting. Be glad," he roared, "that I do not slice away the tip of your disloyal tongue. You are as big a fool as any Ainu pariah."

The youngest priest lowered his head.

His superior, finishing the cigarette, seemed to be studying the young priest. "Go to your prayers," he ordered suddenly.

When the young priest rose, bowed, and shuffled out of the warm central chamber, Tadami-uchi said, as if nothing had happened, "It will not be long before the *Amerika-jin* will become tired of a dead man here and a dead man there, right under their big white noses, and when that time comes, brothers, we will act. And what has been planned will be successful. The Americans intend to bring about order and peace. If the Buddhists fail, if the members of the old Peace Party fail, we will have our chance." He rubbed his hands together softly. "As for young Wazashimo"—the departed priest—"I am a little worried."

The other priests looked from one to the other, nodding slowly.

Tadami-uchi sighed, and placed his hands, clasped, over his capacious middle. "It is not good for a priest to have doubts," he said.

There was a long silence, in which the footsteps of the sentries could be dimly heard.

"Well, brothers?" asked the head priest, sighing again.

Someone said, "He is weak."

"*'Ushi wa ushi-zure, uma wa uma-zure,'*" quoted the priest who had been chided for lack of remembrance. "'Cows consort with cows, and horses with horses.' If he is weak, who can tell with whom Wazashimo will consort one day?"

"I think we agree," said Tadami-uchi.

The quoting priest lit a second cigarette for himself, again not offering it to his superior. A pucker of thought came between Tadami-uchi's thick eyebrows as he marked the lack of courtesy.

"Sumebosu," the head priest said suddenly, "yours is the honor."

The lesser priest jumped to his feet.

Face suffused, he said hoarsely, "Which blade shall I use? This will be an act of devotion to the war god."

Tadami-uchi slipped a nine-inch dirklike weapon from one of his sleeves, and tested the blade by touching the edge of his own robe with it.

"A good blade." He smiled. 'Strike well and deeply, Brother Sumebosu. Remember to clap a hand over his mouth," the head priest continued, in the gentle voice of a father, "in order that the sentries hear no outcry."

Sumebosu promised, "You can rely on me!" He rose, took one quick stride, and then, before he was out of the room, moved in quick cat-steps.

"A good blade," he said. "Strike well and deeply, Brother Sumebosu."

He opened a panel, closed it, and was gone.

Tadami-uchi said, very low, "Brothers, how long will it be before the head of our enemy, the head of Kokochuji, is discovered? We should not be wasting time in our efforts for vengeance and power. Is this not a good time for discovery?"

"It is not easy to sit, waiting," a wizened priest said, "when the spark which we will set off, the lesson which all dutiful men must learn from us, is being delayed. But we dare not go outside ourselves and discover the head. It may be a day or two before it is seen by chance—"

"And until it is discovered," agreed the head priest, in a voice as hard and as cold as Kokochuji's severed head in the bronze receptacle, "nothing will happen. I believe," he went on, after pausing to listen, "that Sumebosu is a man determined to play a great part in that which we intend."

The priests nodded. Like their superior, they, too, were listening. Their lips, as they squatted on their cushions, were tight; one, automatically, was reciting a prayer for the dead, and trying to recall whether the youngest priests's shadow, as cast when he had walked from the room, had truly become thinner, which was what always happened to a man about to die.

SUMEBOSU'S footsteps could not be heard on the matting, although every priest, so enormous was the stillness, heard the boots of the American soldiers on the icy stones beyond the font of purification.

"He is a clever one, Sumebosu," muttered one of the priests. "He does not hurry. The youngest brother will never know that he approaches."

The head priest's frown due to this praise of Sumebosu was infinitesimal. He whispered softly, to the cadence of the soldier's boots, "Surely Sumebosu will therefore approve of playing a greater part than even he imagines will be his."

Tadami-uchi drew one leg more comfortably under the other, and with one hand smoothed a wrinkle in the cushion's silk.

The silence brought sweat to the faces of the priests . . . and then there was a short, savage grunt to be heard in the shrine. Sumebosu, having crept up behind his praying brother, had driven the knife deeply.

A priest said, "*Aaaaaa!*"

Tadami-uchi gave a final delicate smoothing to the vermilion and gold brocade of the cushion over which his huge bulk overflowed. Then, without the slightest preliminary lifting of his head, he screamed, twice, with all the force of his lungs. If the first scream was one of fear, the second had in it the simulated agony of death.

In the tiny fragment of time afterward, during which the head priest sat immobile, and the lesser priests all turned toward him, their eyes wide, the sound of the American soldiers' footsteps stopped—for one brief moment. An instant later there was the clatter of boots on the courtyard's paving stones as the infantrymen rushed toward the great door of the priests' quarters. As an undertone to the pounding feet was the softer sound within the shrine made by the stockinged feet of Sumebosu, hurrying back to rejoin his fellow priests.

The bloody knife was still in his hand as he ran in. He asked, "What has happened?" because, so far as he could see, nothing had happened at all to have caused the screams. Everything seemed as it had been when he had left.

"Come here, Brother Sumebosu," the head priest said swiftly.

Sumebosu obeyed.

"Kneel," said Tadami-uchi. "Kneel before me. Good. You have performed a noble and valiant deed. I wish to express my gratitude."

The younger priest, confounded and amazed, and yet smiling with satisfaction and pleasure, did as he was told. He half turned his head as he knelt squarely before his superior, so that the two Japanese were belly to belly; the movement of his head was instinctive, because of the banging on the massive door as rifle-butts were hammered on it.

Sweat greased Tadami-uchi's face. A muscle jumped in his neck. As delicately as he had stroked the silk of the cushion, he had slipped a second knife from his sleeve . . . and he now brought the blade up so that it ripped the belly of the younger priest clear to the breastbone.

Tadami-uchi's free hand closed over Sumebosu's mouth like an iron claw until the stabbed Japanese' flesh was crushed against his teeth, and his shrieks modulated to an agonized and muffled *ugh-ugh-ugh*. At the same time, the head priests's powerful wrist twisted around, the knife with it, and brought the blade back along the same cut. Halfway. There, the head priest made a swift crosswise cut. Without pause, he pulled the weapon free, and, with one more terrible and blood-spattering blow, drove it to the hilt under his victim's left arm.

The banging on the door was more furious.

Tadami-uchi dropped the dying priest to the matting, and let the knife fall beside him. The matting soaked up blood until the fiber became the identical color of the cushion on which the head priest squatted.

"Permit the ignorant *Amerika-jin* to enter," said Tadami-uchi harshly. "*Seppuku* is what they think they will see," he told his stunned subordinates. "The recovery-of-honor by suicide. Sumebosu," the head priest continued, as if in explanation to the shocked Shintoists, "performed *seppuku* because he violated the

shrine of the great war god by shedding blood, here in the shrine, which was not warrior's blood. Remember that, brothers; Now, unbar the door."

While one of the priests rose to obey, another whispered, "But, lord, Sumebosu was carrying out your august orders—"

"He was," the head priest agreed. "Orders more clever than he himself was able to imagine. The head of that peace-lover, Kokochuji, is certain to be found now, I believe. Therefore Sumebosu, in dying, performed a noble act. His memory will be worshiped. Thousands will soon bow before his grave. He will become as famous as the Ronin, the greatest of all heroes." Tadami-uchi went on solemnly, "Brothers, repeat the vow of the Ronin so that it will give us, and other loyal men, needed courage in these days of disgrace to do what duty demands we do."

The priests began to chant fanatically: "We cannot live under the same heaven as the enemies of our lord." None intoned the vow, known to every Japanese, more fervently than Tadami-uchi, the head priest.

It was this sound of chanting, of prayer, in a strange and foreign lamp-lit chamber, which brought the two infantrymen up short when they entered. It was some time before they marked the sprawled body on the matting, the body of the man who, when dying, certainly must have done the awful screaming.

"Gutted himself," one soldier said to the other.

There was another dead Nip in the shrine, also. The big head priest, not such a bad guy, and very helpful, took the infantrymen to where, before the gleaming sword-*shintai* of the war god, the youngest of the priests lay, face forward. The head priest was polite and courteous, although he was unable to reply to questions in English, which neither soldier expected him to understand. Neither soldier caught the tightening of the head priest's mouth when one of them remarked that it was a relief to be around a Nip so freshly killed that he didn't stink, which was compensation for the reports which would have to be made...

Yes, the big guy was pretty decent. He even accompanied the soldiers outside and part way through the courtyard, until they remembered their orders to keep all the priests inside. It was a good thing the head priest had come outside, however, because when he stumbled and bumped against one of the soldiers, just when passing the funny sort-of-a-fountain, the soldier saw what was in the bronze bowl there.

The severed head was frozen as solid as a Gulf oyster being shipped to Ohio; but a fellow didn't see things like that, Stateside.

"Easy does it" when you use
The low-priced blade well groomed men choose!
That's Thin Gillette, four for a dime—
It cuts down shaving cost and time!
Made of easy-flexing steel hard enough to cut glass
THIN
Gillette
BLADES
Gillette
4 for 10¢
Produced By The Maker Of The Famous Gillette Blue Blade

He even accompanied the soldiers outside and part way through the courtyard.

CHAPTER II

RETURN TO THE YOSHIWARA

EVERY American officer sitting around the table was worried, but none of them was more worried than the G-2 colonel at whom the others were snapping. Damn it, they insisted, this was his job, and he was fumbling the ball. This had to stop. The absolute limit had been reached. Washington was screaming and, unfortunately, had plenty to scream about.

Colonel Humphreys tried to put up a defense. "It's that damned own-the-earth militaristic Black Dragon Society," he protested. "The boys who started the war. But we've got most of the ringleaders rounded up now, and—"

"And the killings go right on," a division commander accused. "Bad as ever. Or worse. What gets me down," he growled, "is that the Nips always pick a spot where my boys are on guard duty, and kill whoever we are supposed to be protecting. I'm sick of it. Makes us look foolish."

"That could be a part of the killers' plan," the C. O. said soberly. "We must find some way to end this killing of those Japanese who were held in prison previous to the occupation. They, the men who objected to Pearl Harbor and war, are the core of a future Japanese government."

"Yesterday," said the division commander, "another was killed. His head came rolling down the street, where my men were, like a football."

Humphreys said, "Nichimura's head. The Minister of Education, who had ordered a change in children's text-books."

"What is the opinion of the liberal Japanese?" asked the C. O.

"Obvious," the G-2 officer said. "Someone is seeing to it that no Japs cooperate with us. But is that all? We don't know. The Japanese," Humphreys added, "have gone in for this sort of assassination for generations. They even worship the memory of a gang of thugs Ronin, Wave-Men, who avenged an insult to the honor of their lord. There were forty-seven of them. The Forty-seven Ronin. Every person in Japan knows the story. But," grunted Humphreys, "those thugs are dead."

The C. O. relit his pipe.

"A successful occupation means there must be a change in Japanese thought. This can only come about through the Japanese themselves. If this doesn't happen, we will be forced to occupy Japan for years, or face another war. And what is going on," the C. O. said, "must be stopped."

"What I'll not do," said Humphreys bitterly, "is send any more of our Nisei, American soldiers of Japanese descent, out to try and find out what's what. When those boys are detected, we find an arm on one street and a leg on another. And yet the fellows continue to volunteer for that duty."

"From killing cooperative Japanese to killing us will be just a short step," said the C. O. "This conference," he admitted, "is exactly where it began, gentlemen. Has no one a suggestion?"

"One of my officers," said the Air Forces general, "who has been hospitalized in Okinawa was flown here last night. I asked him to report. I did this, frankly, to ask him what he thought of all this."

"And?"

The general shrugged. He smiled slightly, and then said, "He has an idea that we are nowhere near a solution."

"Hell!" barked the G-2 officer. "We all know that. I suppose," went on Colonel Humphreys, "that your pilot wants to be transfered to Intelligence and solve the mysteries of the universe?"

"He doesn't want to solve anything," General Griffith said. "He wants to return to the States. But he came over here with me, and I thought you gentlemen might wish to question him. He knows Tokyo. And Japs."

The C. O. said, "Bring him in."

A moment later a stocky officer entered the room. He was closely shaved, but even so there was a hint of darkness on his cheeks, proof of the heaviness of his beard, and that it must be the same black color as his close-cropped hair. He was broad-shouldered and swarthy, although hospitalization had faded the tan of his face. On his jacket were medal ribbons, but no theater-of-war ribbons at all.

His superior said, "Major Davies, gentlemen."

The G-2 officer jumped up. "The hell you say!" he said excitedly, shaking Davies' hand while the others rose.

"Any man," said the C. O., "who could remain undetected in Japan, all through the war, has a chance to get to the bottom of this."

Colonel Humphreys' excitement bubbled over. "We'll turn you into an Ainu pariah again, Major," he said. "Your final operation. It won't be anything compared to what you've already done, but we need what you can learn damned badly. You won't have any difficulty in roaming around and finding out what's behind all these murders. It'll be like shooting fish in a barrel for you."

Davies remained silent.

The C. O. said grimly, "You know what has been going on?"

"Yes, sir," said Lew.

"We are not only losing those Japanese who want to govern Japan decently," the C. O. told Davies, "but we are losing face because we can't stop the killings. It is safe to assume

that the seeds of real future trouble are already sprouting. I do not intend," the occupation commander said gravely, "to *order* you to see what can be found out, Major Davies, because you have already served your country far beyond the call of duty. But—"

The room became silent.

Davies said, "Sir, as Koropok the Ainu I had shaggy hair and a beard. I was able to fool the Japanese." Lew ran a hand over his chin. "I'm afraid, now, that I'd be licked before anything could be accomplished. The first Jap," said Lew, who knew only too well, "who sees me where there is no occupation soldier around on duty, and supposes me to be an Ainu pariah, will grab me by the beard before slapping me to my knees. And—well, the false beard will come off."

"The Japs' days of slapping others around are over," someone remarked.

Humphreys disagreed. "A good slap, given a pariah who won't report it, restores a little of the Nips' lost face and makes 'em feel superior again," he said. "I can see why my suggestion won't work. Oh, well, it was an idea." He sighed. "Anyhow, Davies can have a look at the records."

"Thank you, sir," said Lew.

BECAUSE everyone seemed to be waiting for him to say something, the man who, as Koropok the Ainu, knew exactly what had gone on in Japan during the war, said, "If those Japanese who desire the establishment of a decent government are unable to explain who is responsible for the murders, I don't see how any of us, who think like Americans, will get very far."

"They know *what* is responsible, and so do we, and so do you, Major," the G-2 officer said. "They don't know *who*. If we could get at that . . . if only we could find out who is the head of the damned gang."

Davies said, thinking aloud, "That's not easy. It could be any one of a dozen groups. It could even be men who seemingly are cooperating with you, sir." The man who had masqueraded as Koropok asked suddenly, "Who was killed first?"

"Uriju Kokochuji. We had him slated for an important job. His body," Humphreys stated, "was found in his home. His head was frozen in the receptacle outside the big Shinto shrine. A couple of our men found it," went on the G-2 officer, "when they went to investigate a yell they heard in the temple—the shrine, I mean. One priest killed another priest, and then killed himself. Blood and guts all over the place. We wasted a lot of time," said Humphreys wryly, "trying to connect Kokochuji's death, and subsequent murders, with the priests."

Nodding, Davies said, "Nobody hates us more than the Shintoists. Next to the militarists, they've lost the most by defeat. Those priests had fat years. "Not," said Lew, "that the skunks who were given the opium concessions in China are very happy now. They've taken it on their financial chins. As have a lot of Japanese who ran the licensed quarters. So there are plenty of Japs who'd like to push us out of Japan." Davies broke down his own conclusion by remarking, "But a continuation of outrages will keep us here just that much longer."

"Right," agreed the C. O.

"Perhaps," Davies said quietly, his thick black eyebrows—his one resemblance to Koropok the Ainu—drawn close together, "perhaps whoever is planning these murders prefers us to having Japanese run Japan. That's a possibility."

"Rather have the Four Freedoms than the way it was?"

Lew said, "Perhaps."

"Why?"

Davies said, "If I could tell you that, maybe we'd have the answer, sir."

"At least it's the injection of a different idea," said the C. O. "We have worked on the opposite theory, Davies."

"Yes, sir," said Lew.

As the C. O. rose, dismissing the conference, Colonel Humphreys promised Davies that the reports would be made available for him, and that he should question any of the men mentioned in the reports, as well as those who had done the investigating for G-2. All of the officers were standing, and the Air Forces chief was speaking to his major about lunch later, when a technical sergeant entered the room. Without delay, he placed another report before Humphreys, who read it quickly. As the Intelligence officer read, a grim look appeared on his face.

"This time," said Humphreys, "it is Matsu Shikibu, a member of the Imperial Household. Found, decapitated, within the grounds of the Imperial Palace. His head has not yet been found."

Unnecessarily, another officer explained, "He was one of the Moderates. Not a bad old boy, for a Jap. But it isn't possible that he was killed within the palace grounds. We've got them carefully guarded—"

"By *my* outfit," mourned the division commander. "It was done from the inside," he snapped. "Somebody in the palace did it. My boys have the grounds so well watched not even an ant could crawl in. I—"

The C. O. interrupted wearily, "And what Washington will say to this, you can all guess."

Davies had been rubbing his chin. "Colonel Humphreys," said Lew suddenly, "I wonder how much of a jerk a false beard could stand.

We could try it out." A wry grin twisted his mouth as he put a hand to his head. "The Nips never grabbed me by the hair, top-side," he said. "Maybe that isn't *bushido.*" He glanced down at his crisp uniform. "From riches to rags," grinned Llewelyn Davies. "And here I was all set to give the gals a chance, Stateside. Oh, well."

The C. O. said, as lightly as Davies, "No girl at home, Major?"

"No, sir," admitted Lew. "I was thinking of playing the field. Or perhaps I've been waiting for a little blonde to grow up. I've always been partial to blondes, sir. Now there is one I remember—"

"You needn't try to fool me," said the C. O. gently. "I know what chances you are taking, Major." The C. O.'s hand shot out and gripped Lew's. "Good luck. We'll see to it that we keep an eye on you."

Davies said sharply, "If the beard business will stand up, you are to forget that there will be a pariah known as Koropok in Tokyo. If any attempt is made to watch or protect me, I won't make the try. Is that plain?"

Not until later did Davies realize the manner in which he had addressed the commander of the occupation forces; but when he did recall it, he also remembered the way in which the C. O. had smiled.

IF NO worshipers could run to the shrine of the war god, naked, when the late afternoon winter sun slanted down, white and cold, and if few came there to worship at all, hardly more Japanese walked toward Tokyo's licensed quarter, although far better entertainment could be expected within the district. Those who did come, at an afternoon hour when Japanese were permitted on the streets, bowed deeply before the M.P.s posted at the entrance, stationed there as visible evidence to all GI's that the famous district was out of bounds.

The M. P.s stood under the bare branches of a tree which drooped over the gate; a twisted and gnarled ancient trunk rose inside the gate. The look-back willow. Long ago, in feudal days, it was the custom of Yoshiwara maids to accompany the guests of the night as far as the gate, since no girl, once entering the quarter, after being sold into it by her parents, was allowed to leave. But when the nightly guest passed through the gate, he would turn back for another glance at the maid. Thus the tree got its name.

The pariah who shuffled along the street toward the licensed quarter did not lift his eyes to see the willow. He was not looking back; he had everything ahead of him. As he approached the licensed quarter, he was dirtier and more ragged than the sorriest beggar who held out a mendicant's bowl for a handful of millet. He was filthier than the small boys who screamed at the Japanese who walked toward the Yoshiwara.

The pariah's beard was thick, black, and matted. His shaggy hair was a little less black; dirt had made it look gray. The Ainu jacket which he wore was tattered; one sleeve was entirely gone, as if ripped away.

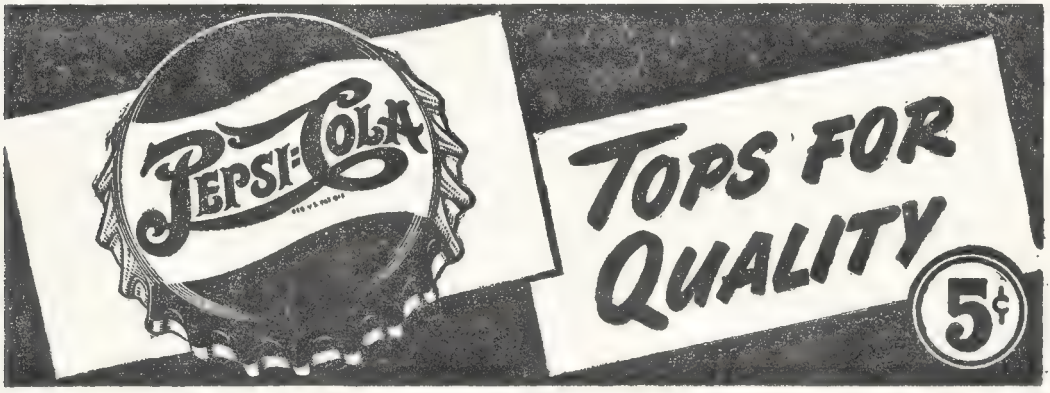
Once, as he shuffled ahead, he gripped one wrist with the other hand.

Koropok the Ainu.

He was thinking, *The coldest day of the year! Why couldn't I keep my damned mouth shut!* But, in spite of Major Davies' thoughts, the eyes which were supposed to mirror thought were as dull, opaque, and as truly like the eyes of a pariah as only Lew's years in Japan, in disguise, could make them.

The Japanese boys were screaming their curious wares, pieces of printed paper made to resemble a treasure-boat, in which the seven gods of luck appeared, together with pictured gold coins, coral, and other indications of wealth. On the sheets was a Japanese poem,

Na ka ki yo no,
To o no ne fu ri no,
Mi na me sa me,
Na mi no ri fu ne no,
O to no yo ki ka na,



and no matter which way the poem was read, whether from start or finish, it read the same way and produced the same meaning.

Davies, deep in his own job, gave no thought to these *otakari-uri* sellers as they vended wares which had been sold for generations.

The boys each had a portion of their faces covered with a handkerchief, also according to custom, and all of them hurried toward the licensed quarter, because it was well known that the maids within were generous when purchasing the Sheets of Luck . . . although, on this afternoon, the men who were walking to the district were not the excellent purchasers they had been in the past.

Each man bowed to the M. P.s, just as they had always bowed to their own soldiers, but Davies wondered how many of the men in civilian attire might have been soldiers a short time ago. When he reached the gate, he bowed also, more deeply than any of the Japanese.

One of the M. P.s said, "You goin' in there, Gran'pa?"

Koropok bowed again.

"He don't look like no Jap," said the other. "He looks suspicious. Maybe he's tryin' to look disguised as a Russky? Look at them whiskers! Maybe we better hold him for the sarge. The looie says to grab everybody suspicious and then let somebody figure it out later. So maybe—"

"Wait a sec'," broke in the first M. P. "The sarge gets sore as hell when we yell for him and it ain't nothin'." He demanded, as he had been taught, *"Oh nam yee wa nan to ooo?"* asking, in something like Japanese, for the man's name.

The army major masquerading as a pariah

As he shuffled ahead, Davies was thinking, The coldest day of the year. Why couldn't I keep my damn mouth shut!

stared at the soldier as if he did not understand, and then bowed again.

"Oh nam yee wa nan to ooo, damn it!" The M. P. yelled, in English, "Don't you understand your own monkey talk?"

When the M. P. yelled, Koropok dropped to the ground.

A pudgy Japanese, bowing himself, said in excellent English, "Can I be of any assistance?"

"Ask him his name."

"O namaye w' nan to iu?" snarled the Japanese. "And speak rapidly, dog, or the *Amerikajin* devil will cut off your tongue!"

Davies whimpered, "Koropok, lord."

The Japanese spelled it for the soldiers. "He is an outcast," said Nishu Benji. "A pariah. A person who performs menial tasks. He—"

"Who asked you what he does, Harvard Charley?" barked one of the M. P.s. "Get along inside, both of you."

The pudgy Japanese dodged around a couple of urchins, with their Sheets of Luck, in hurrying off. The ragged pariah rose slowly, looked fearfully at the two M. P.s, and then stepped behind them. In English, swiftly but clearly, Davies remarked, "You two act like a pair of dumb cops."

He regretted the impulse instantly as the M. P.s whirled; but both shouted a warning after the hastily departing Nishu Benji, thinking that he must have done the jeering in English.

Davies, on the principal street of the licensed quarter, warned himself, *Go ahead acting smart. Do it again, and you'll probably mess everything up and get a knife in your neck as a dividend.*

MAIDS from the houses were running out to purchase the Sheets of Luck, which they would place under their pillows and hope for the happy dream which would mean happiness and good fortune during the coming year.

One girl, standing before the particular house, Number Nineteen, where Koropok had been the lowest of servants before being seized and sent to Formosa to labor in the camphor jungles along with hundreds of other pariahs, stood on the step under the carved eaves and read from the sheet, in a high-pitched nasal monotone:

"Na ma ki yo no,
To o no ne fu ri no,
Mi na me sa me,
Na mi no ri fu ne no,
O to no yo—

and then she stopped abruptly.

Instead of reading the final words of the ancient poem, she shrilled, *"Hayaku! Hayaku!* Come quickly, everyone! See who is arriving! Oh, what a very strange happening! *Hayaku!"*

Unengaged maids ran to look; the fat manager of Number Nineteen, Suriga himself, pushed through the girls to see what was exciting them, hoping that it would be many customers, although the cry of the maid was not the polite manner in which guests should be greeted. An oily grin parted his thick lips, and he laughed at what he saw as he begged ironically, *"O toshi mose!* Show the honorable person in! We must not keep such an important guest waiting!"

When Koropok was inside, Suriga said sharply, "So you have returned!"

"Yes, lord. I—I am hungry."

The pudgy Japanese, Nishu Benji, apparently dissatisfied with arrangements at a different house, had entered the hallway of Nineteen. Unnoticed, he watched and listened, his hands folded across his stomach.

"You are hungry!" snarled Suriga. "Who is not hungry? Everyone is hungry! Why should I feed a pariah dog? You would not earn your food here. Few guests arrive in these evil days. Go away!"

Koropok cowered down, but Davies was thinking, *When he's finished he'll allow me to stay here, and work like hell, for no money and little food. This is all an act. But I take whatever he gives, because a house in this district is the best spot to find out what goes on in Tokyo . . . and Nineteen always received Number-One guests.*

Japanese curiosity made Suriga ask, just when Koropok began to turn as if to leave, "Where have you been?"

Koropok mumbled, in clipped Ainu dialect, *"Ich' ne' tat'nu 'chi 'i.* In a land where we died." The masquerader, heart beating fast, held out his wrists, and an involuntary grunt issued from Suriga's mouth, while the staring girls instinctively put their own hands over their own wrists. "We were bound at night," explained the man disguised as a despised pariah, "so we could not run away, lord."

Suriga examined what appeared to be the marks left by thongs.

Those G-2 boys really know their stuff, thought Lew. Even to Davies, the condition of his wrists looked real. *Now if Suriga yanks me around by the beard, and it doesn't come off, I'll feel safer.*

The manager did exactly that, to cover up what might have looked like sympathy. He grabbed the pariah's beard and, as Davies carefully gave to the jerk, not too obviously, flung the man in rags to the matting of the floor.

"How dare you criticize the actions of our soldiers," squealed the manager of Nineteen. "Oh, how I intend to beat you! Go instantly to your kennel beside the kitchen, and when I am ready I will give you such a beating that—"

The manager grabbed the pariah's beard and flung him to the floor.

"If you beat him so greatly," said Nishu Benji, who was so pudgy and short that he had remained unseen behind the girls, "he will not be worth anything to you." He stepped through the lane which the girls, hastily moving aside, made for him. "How did you get back to Japan, dog?" he asked Koropok.

Koropok did not lift his head from the matting. He said, "We were brought here by the *Amerika-jin*, lord." But silently Davies was asking himself, *What's this Jap's interest in how a pariah was returned? Does he actually give a damn, or is it the usual Japanese curiosity?*

Koropok saw their faces. Round. White with powder. Stupid.

"Lord," continued Koropok, intending to find out, "we—we were told by the *Amerika-jin* . . . oh, I cannot say it!"

"You had better say it," suggested Nishu Benji, "or the beating which the manager promised you will be like the tickle of a fly compared to what I will give you. Come! What were you told?"

Koropok whispered hoarsely, *"Dat'kushi no yo' bim'nin.* If I say, you will kill me, lord."

"If you do not say, I am certain to kill you!"

"We . . . the pariahs . . . are to be as—as other men," whispered Koropok, covering his head as if to ward off a kick. "The *Amerika-jin* told us that we will be permitted to—to go where we wish, to do what we wish . . ."

Nishu Benji shrugged.

He said, "That is as was expected." He was about to give the pariah a casual shove with his foot when, half under his breath, he repeated what the groveling masquerader had said. " 'To go where we wish!' Honorable brothel-keeper," the pudgy Nishu Benji said softly, "beat him very little. Very little. Or not at all. And do not allow him to run away. Remember that!"

Suriga bowed. "But how can I keep him, in these unfortunate dāys, against his stupid and unintelligent desires?"

"I will supply a bit of help there," promised Nishu Benji. "However, until the help arrives, bind him well. If he gets away," smiled the pudgy Japanese, "I fear that your own head may be the price of negligence."

"I will tie him until he is a cocoon!"

No flicker of interest betrayed Davies. Actually, Nishu Benji might be merely inferring that Suriga would be punished severely should he allow the bearded pariah to get away. On the other hand, there might be more behind what the pudgy English-speaking Nip had threatened.

DAVIES was not at all surprised at what was taking place. A Japanese brothel like Number Nineteen was the best place in Japan to find out what went on. During the war, here, admirals, in their cups, had first boasted as to the date they would sail into San Francisco, and later whined at the lack of army cooperation. And generals had explained to other generals why the navy was responsible for the failures to hold important island positions. And the new-rich *narikin* had blamed both army and navy . . . while the military men had been caustic concerning the desires of the merchants and manufacturers. All of the talk had been of no concern to the maids of Nineteen, who, doll-like, performed their duties and repeated nothing.

Koropok, on the floor, saw their faces now. Round. White with powder. Stupid. He had seen them in the past, without komonos. Brown bags.

He saw, too, the faces of the two men. Suriga's was questioning; Nishu Benji's seemed elated and excited.

"As for you, dog," the latter said to the man on the floor, "believe only what we, your lords, tell you. Obey us. And do not listen to American lies."

"No, lord."

Nishu Benji opened and closed a hand, as if a sword were in it. "He is better than nothing," said the Japanese. "Or—is he?"

A true Nip, thought Lew. *First he makes up his mind to do something, and gets all worked up over it, and then he becomes doubtful. That's why the devils didn't land on Hawaii after Pearl Harbor, and just keep on going. So now I've got to give Harvard Charley a push, and it had better be good.*

"Lord," he whined, "must I become a dog for the *Amerika-jin*? Oh, great one, I do not wish for such a terrible thing to happen."

"Why not?"

"Because they killed my brothers," said Koropok. "They killed my brothers with a death coming down from the sky, lord."

The pudgy Japanese smiled slowly. He licked his lips as if he had been eating succulent fat eels simmered in their own juices. He actually reached down and patted the shaggy head of the supposed Ainu, which made Davies' heart almost stop because of the anchored wig. But while Nishu Benji was clearing his throat with the customary hiss before speaking, three more

men, well protected against the cold, entered Number Nineteen.

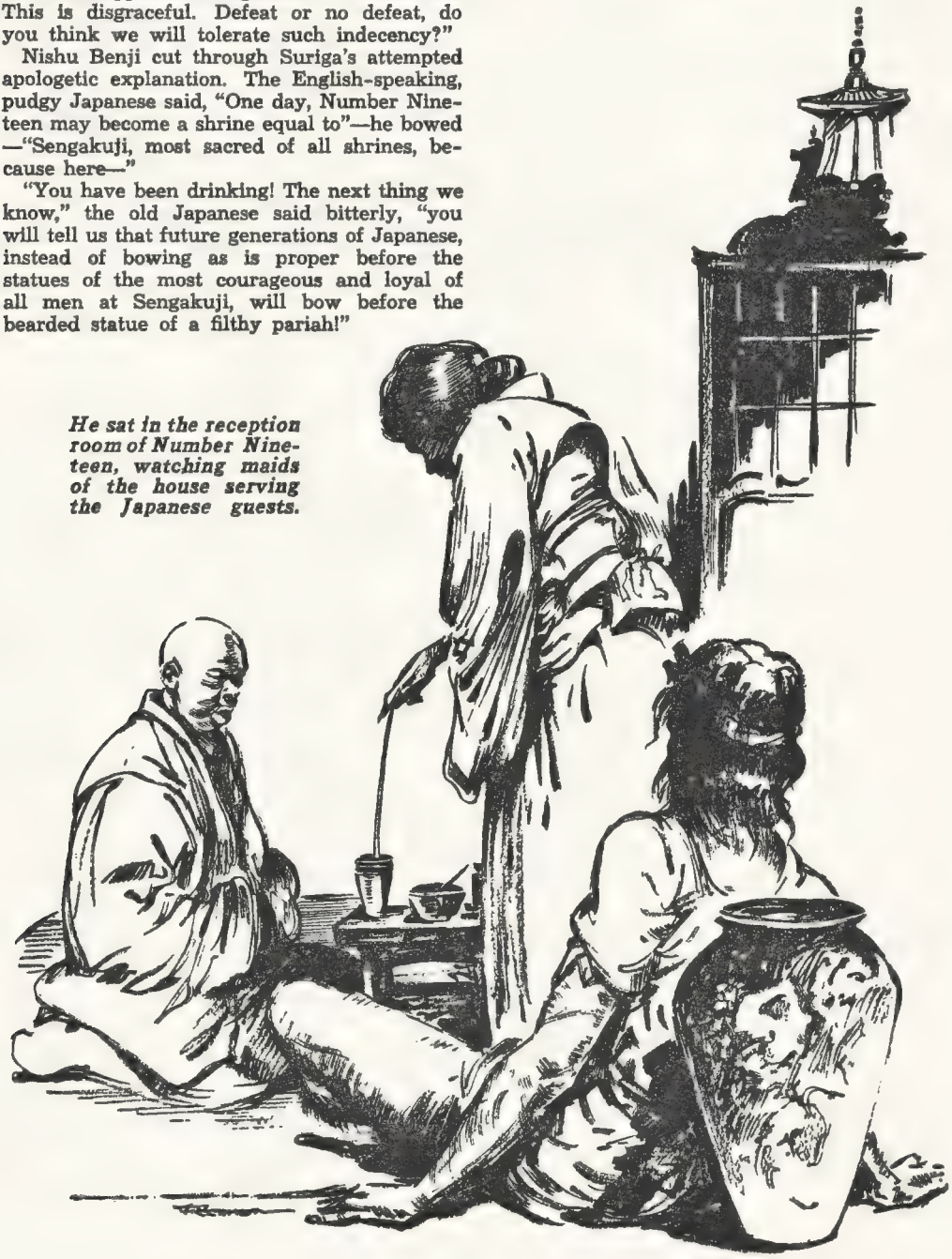
The oldest of them jibed, to Nishu Benji, "Ho! Is this where you select your maids for the night?" and continued, sternly, to the manager, "What has Number Nineteen become? A place of fourth-class entertainment? Where the maids appear to the guests in a showroom? This is disgraceful. Defeat or no defeat, do you think we will tolerate such indecency?"

Nishu Benji cut through Suriga's attempted apologetic explanation. The English-speaking, pudgy Japanese said, "One day, Number Nineteen may become a shrine equal to"—he bowed—"Sengakuji, most sacred of all shrines, because here—"

"You have been drinking! The next thing we know," the old Japanese said bitterly, "you will tell us that future generations of Japanese, instead of bowing as is proper before the statues of the most courageous and loyal of all men at Sengakuji, will bow before the bearded statue of a filthy pariah!"

Nishu Benji bowed to the older Japanese. "Perhaps I will," he said. Through a chorus of protests at such sacrilege, the pudgy Japanese whom the M. P.s had called Harvard Charley added, "He is more than a pariah."

With this Davies could agree.



He sat in the reception room of Number Nineteen, watching maids of the house serving the Japanese guests.

The pudgy Japanese added, "He is more than a pariah."

Nishu Benji whispered something to the oldest of the Japanese, who, after listening carefully, nodded in agreement.

"I have decided not to have you bind the pariah," Nishu Benji informed Suriga. "He comes with me. Now take us to the reception room."

Davies, shuffling down the corridor with the guests, was disgusted and uneasy. This was not what he had wanted, not at all. He had expected to be able to get around; this would be impossible now. The "help" which Nishu Benji had mentioned earlier, in regard to holding the pariah secure, would certainly be secretly armed Japanese. The best Davies could hope for would be that later he might elude them, if he found out anything . . . but his opportunities for making any discoveries would be limited.

He did not forget that Nishu Benji's first interest in him, however, had only become apparent when the Japanese realized that an Ainu could go where he wished, without being checked on. Would the places he went, and the messages he might carry, give Lew what G-2 wanted—the person responsible for the killings, for the trouble the occupation commanders feared would follow?

At about the time the gang must be gathering for a drink before dinner, Major Davies was sitting in the reception room of Number Nineteen watching maids of the house serving the Japanese guests with tea and brittle cookies. He knew that there would be liquor, but that would come later.

CHAPTER III

THE DEADLY RONIN

HE HAD plenty at which to guess, did Llewelyn Davies, as he squatted in a corner of the room. Japan was, and always had been, a land of plotting. Army against navy. Moderate against conservative. Religion against religion. Military violently opposed to manufacturers. And there were plenty of cliques within cliques. G-2 was convinced, with logic behind the conviction, that the murders were intended to end Japanese cooperation with the occupation authorities. Davies had no fault to find with G-2's conclusion; but did it go far enough?

If I could do something which would cause the Nips to be doubtful about their original plans, they'd get all excited, Jap-fashion, decided Davies, while the two singing-maids droned away to the accompaniment of a samisen. *Then perhaps I'd get something positive to go on.*

Nishu Benji and the three other Japanese were up to something. Were other Japs meeting in other houses? There was no way in which Davies could find that out at present.

The pudgy Nip had threatened Suriga with the loss of the manager's head; that, however, might have been said merely because what was taking place all over Tokyo was common

knowledge. However, Nishu Benji intended using a pariah in something which had to do with a Japanese-style deed of loyalty and courage, akin to what had been accomplished by the celebrated and deadly Ronin . . .

Davies' figuring continued until squat black bottles of saki appeared on red-lacquer trays, along with taller bottles of Scotch from Singapore. Nishu Benji and the others paid their *najimi-kin,* intimacy money, so that they could be served by personal and individual maids.

Saki and Scotch were indiscriminately imbibed; the faces of the guests, in the tightly closed reception room, became sweaty and red. Suddenly Nishu Benji shouted, "Sing the song of the Sheets of Luck!" and a singing-maid began it.

"Na ka ki yo no,
To o no ne fu ri no,
Mi na me sa me,
Na mi no ri fu ne no,
O to no yo ki ka na!"

At the final line, all of the liquor-excited Japanese first raised their bullet heads, and then, to Davies' amazement, lowered them reverently. The mouths of all the guests were moving, but silently. Here and there Davies caught a monotonous and unaccented syllable, enough for him to guess at the familiar remainder; and what the four Japanese were mouthing was: "We cannot live under the same heaven as the enemies of our lord!"

So that's it, Davies realized. *Modern Ronin! Modern murderers, vengeance-killers.* The word "Ronin", the American knew, meant, literally, a wave-man, one who was tossed about as a wave of the sea. It designated men of samurai blood who were entitled to bear arms, and who were prevented, by their own acts, or dismissal, or fate, or defeat, from continuing to serve a master.

Davies knew also why the song was connected with the Ronin and the vow. Translated, it meant, "We wake from sleep after a long night, and we listen to sounds of the sea and of the waves."

He had no opportunity to start piecing together what he now realized, even if this had been possible. Nishu Benji had leaped to his feet.

The pudgy Japanese' entertainment kimono was open to the waist. Liquor, fury because of defeat, and the vow itself had readied him for a banzai-charge; it took the form of words instead.

"Teppo motaba uchi-korosu no desu," he howled, glaring at the squatted pariah. "I would kill him if we did not need him! Oh, I have killed more than one shaggy-haired person, even if I was not in the army! Oh, it was my duty to question the American prisoners, whose hair had grown long like this

The maid's footsteps sounded ta-da ta-da ta-da, *like the portion of the name Lew wanted.*

dog's! Let me tell you I was not easy on them!"

"There was usefulness in that," simpered another of the Japanese. "*Ai!* We had practice in the severing of heads! How that has helped us now! And how successful we are in—*aaaaaaaaa!*—serving our lord!"

Davies was all ears. He listened to the repeating of the vow, "We cannot live under the same heaven as the enemies of our lord!" and his thoughts were racing now. It was apparent to him that the Emperor *should* be the lord of his subjects, but unless what Davies had read in the G-2 reports was badly bungled, the decapitated Japanese were men who *had* been loyal to the Tenno. The sole argument on the other side was that the assassins, the Ronin, considered the advice given by the moderates to the Tenno to be bad and disloyal advice, which warranted death. Davies rejected the latter argument.

If the Tenno were not the lord whose honor must be avenged, who *was* the lord? Davies had not the slightest idea. He maintained his physical masquerade perfectly as he squatted in the room, with the singing and noise and sound of drinking around him; he looked a pariah, a dog, an outcast.

Thought did not pucker his eyebrows. Then, as a notion came to him, his mouth puckered involuntarily . . . and he whistled. Once.

THE guests' noise stopped abruptly. Nishu Benji, who had been standing with a bowl slopping over with whiskey in his hand, let the blue and white porcelain drop to the matting, where the fragile object shattered.

"Who whistled?" he whispered. "It is not yet time! We will not act until there is a word from Tada—"

The oldest and least drunken of the Japanese had risen. He clapped a skinny hand over the pudgy Japanese' mouth.

"Silence!" he ordered. "*Baka!* Fool!" The old Japanese snarled at the pariah, "Did you learn to make that sound from the *Amerika-jin* dog?"

Koropok said, "Sound, lord?"

"Yes! The sound of a whistle!"

"I have no whistle, lord."

Nishu Benji said, "I heard it."

The Japanese stared from one to the other. Finally the old Japanese said, after drawing a relieved breath, "It must have been the disorderly conduct of the American military police who stand at the gate. They do not behave as is expected of civilized soldiers. I have heard them make the impolite whistle-noise when some maid passes. This sound must have carried to us."

Davies, also, was relieved. *That's twice I've slipped,* he told himself in disgust. *Three times is apt to be out.*

But the excitement of the Japanese caused by his brief involuntary whistling, and what they had said, gave him something more on which to figure. The sound of a whistle was involved in the Nips' plotting. The whistle was to be a signal. Davies believed he knew why and how it was to be used.

His reasoning was simple. The Japs, as shown during the war by the manner in which they first attacked, then later defended their stolen gains, invariably followed an established pattern. They intended to follow custom again, in a plot where the signal would be a whistle.

This sound of a whistle, long ago, had been the signal for the assassination of a samurai called Kotsuke no Suke, who had insulted the lord of a defeated band of retainers known as Ronin. Wave-Men. This Kotsuke no Suke had taken the other lord's wealth, power, and importance from him. All modern Japan worshiped the memories of these murderers, whose tombs were at Sengakuji.

What Lew did not know was on whom the vengeance was to fall. "We will not act until there is word from Tada—" Nishu Benji had said, before he could be stopped from speaking. This name, or portion of a name, must be that of the person who was at the head of the plot, and, therefore, apt to be the Jap whom the plotters intended to avenge. Someone who had lost wealth, power, and importance. Who? Lew wished there had been fewer Japanese names in G-2's reports, so that he might have remembered this one.

Getting out of the district to find out, now that Nineteen's manager had him back, was out of the question.

And whatever was going to happen could not be far off in time.

Quietly, Davies made up his mind, there on the floor of the reception room, that what he had planned, which had caused him to whistle, must be carried to completion. If the Nips could be jerked out of secrecy by the unexpected whistle, Lew was positive that what he had considered doing would really set them on their ears. He hoped he could manage it! When the oldest of the Japanese remarked that it was growing late, Davies began to sweat a little, because in a matter of moments he would know whether or not his guess as to how Nishu Benji would act was correct. It was.

Nishu Benji said shortly, "The pariah comes with me," because the pudgy Japanese intended to see to it that all credit for what was to be done, by means of the Ainu, would come to Nishu Benji.

He himself, with his belly stuck out, led the way along the corridor. Behind him trotted the maid for whom he had paid the intimacy money. Koropok shambled along in the rear; and Davies was delighted that he followed unwatched, since it proved that Nishu Benji had no doubts about him.

The maid's footsteps sounded to Lew like *ta-da ta-da ta-da,* like the portion of the name he wanted. Threatening Nishu Benji with death would not get it. But there was a way to get it. If it worked, and Davies did get to the bottom of the plot, he had to get the account of it to men who would go into immediate action. Getting himself killed, after finding out, would serve no purpose.

It'd be a hell of time to be hacked to pieces, thought Davies. *The war's over and I'm all set to go Stateside.*

The chance he was going to take made him cold. But he was able, as he followed the Japanese man and the Japanese maid down the long perfumed corridor, to take a deep breath, unobserved. Then the maid whispered a giggled apology, hurried to slide back a panel for her guest, the honorable Nishu Benji.

The pudgy Japanese swaggered in, stumbling slightly until Number Nineteen's maid assisted him unobtrusively to a cushion on which he squatted. He stared at Koropok the Ainu, and then exploded into laughter.

"Oh, nothing like this has ever happened to me before," he wheezed. "This is a new experience, even for me."

"Yes, honorable guest," agreed the maid, moving a smoking-stand nearer to him, and pouring another cupful of liquor before kneeling beside him.

Nishu Benji pushed the cup aside. "I am not one who speaks only to be answered by silence," he flung at the pariah. "Ho! When the shaggy-headed *Amerika-jin* would not speak to me, I knew what to do about it! You! Dog! Speak!"

"Dan' sa' yor'shi'rba wa'kush' g'zar'mas'," mumbled Koropok. "It will be a new experience for you, lord."

NUMBER NINETEEN. In some other room another guest was being entertained more formally than Nishu Benji desired; Davies, as he stood waiting while the Japanese smoked, heard the tapping of a drum, at first slow, and then running into a quick, rousing tempo. There, a dancing-girl was performing

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the same dance as was always performed, in exactly the same way—just as the Japanese always followed the customs of the past. Her arms would be outstretched, Davies knew, and her sleeves would be swaying, while her fan invited and promised . . .

Here, the maid busied herself with tending Nishu Benji, until Davies wondered if she would ever rise and go for quilts and mosquito netting. When she did stand, to beg permission to leave for a moment, the pudgy Japanese grabbed at her kimono; the silk of it hissed through his fingers. She smiled down at him, and then pattered from the room.

Davies took two long, swift strides. His fingers were around the throat of the Japanese before Nishu Benji's mouth could open, and almost before the panel had been pushed closed by the departing maid.

"A new experience," whispered Davies, in a voice as hard as steel and in English.

He didn't know whether the popping of the Japanese' eyes was because Harvard Charley understood the language and the words, or whether the pressure of Lew's fingers was forcing the eyeballs out of the ex-torturer's head. He didn't care.

The rest was butcher's work. Davies knew from living at Number Nineteen exactly where, according to custom, a maid would keep her long gift-knives. But it was an ugly, bloody business.

He wiped his hands, at the end, on the Japanese' own kimono. He examined his own rags. Not spattered. He looked again at the outer wall; the window there was shut, but not fastened. He ran to it, and put a blood-smear on the lacquered sill. After that, he searched Nishu Benji swiftly and found a Sheet of Luck. *Maybe they use 'em for communicating,* he thought, but he dared not take the time to examine the sheet carefully, nor did he dare attempt to conceal it.

He paused now and took a deep breath. Would this do it, this headless body? Or would this be the finish of both Koropok and Davies?

There was the rapid beating of the drum, the brittle tinkling of a stringed instrument, and the voice of a maid as she sang an ancient song. Somewhere in Nineteen, coarsely, a man laughed.

Davies put his fingers to his lips. Once, shrilly, he whistled.

The laugh and the drum and the music stopped. The softly singing provocative voice fainted away to silence.

Clearly, loudly, in Japanese vastly different from the clipped dialect of the Ainu, Davies chanted, "We cannot live under the same heaven as the enemies of our lord!"

After he had done that, he crouched down in the dimmest corner of the room, as far as possible from the window.

Number Nineteen's panels shook with shouts. Bare feet thudded in the corridor as guests ran to investigate, forgetting all politeness as rooms were unceremoniously entered. The oldest of the Japanese came running out of one of the rooms, sputtering with worry. For a moment he was bumped this way and that, and finally against Nishu Benji's maid. She and her quilts were knocked down; she whimpered as, on her knees, she collected the night-paraphernalia again.

Suriga, the manager, was first in Nishu Benji's room. What he saw there—the decapitated body on the blood-soaked matting, and the grinning head on the little lacquered smoking-stand—turned his face the color of a dirty tomb-cloth. He gagged, covered his mouth with both hands, and stared.

The withered old Japanese, shaken mentally and physically, his face gray also, was the first to speak. What he said proved how thoroughly Davies understood the Nipponese psychology.

"He must have been disloyal," snarled the old man, "and therefore Tadami-uchi ordered his death."

That's that much, thought the man in tatters. *Now let's see if he doesn't become doubtful of his own reasoning, Jap-fashion.*

The old man did. "But why would Nishu Benji's head remain here?" he said, as he thought aloud. "The *Amerika-jin* will never find it here! They are forbidden by their own authorities to enter the district. They—"

"Perhaps it is because Nishu Benji was disloyal, and not like those Japanese who wish to injure our lord," a Japanese of the party suggested. "It may be that all our lord required was his death, not that it be learned about by the Americans. Perhaps that is why Nishu Benji died here."

"But the whistle! The whistle!"

As Davies had figured, the Japanese were terribly confused, just as they were whenever the unexpected took place. He was positive now that he could give G-2 the information needed. Tadami-uchi! The characters forming the name leaped like zigzags before Davies' eyes: Tadami-uchi, the head priest of a powerful Shinto shrine, who was fighting to recover what the Shintoists were losing to both the Americans and the rival sect of Buddhists. The head priest had organized fanatics into a band like the famous Ronin, the Wave-Men, who would willingly die in order to avenge an insult to their leader.

It also occurred to the American, as puckered foreheads told him the sound of the whistle was completely puzzling to the Japanese, that if peaceful Japanese could not maintain order under the occupation forces, Shintoists who would assume a different cloak could again secure control. It was not a simple affair; but neither was anything in the Orient.

Keiri Bassaku, the old Japanese, broke the silence.

"The pariah," he demanded. "Where is he?"

Koropok did not move, not until he was dragged from his corner.

"How many men killed Nishu Benji?" he was asked.

"Only one man, lord," whined Koropok.

"How, fool?"

Davies raised a trembling finger, and pointed toward the window.

"And when Nishu Benji, who must have been part Ainu dog, was dead, what did the other man do?"

"He took a little shining something from his jacket, lord. He put it up to his mouth. He puffed into it and sound came. I—"

Keiri Bassaku said, "The whistle!"

"He has seen and heard too much," someone grated. "We had better kill him at once, here and now."

The old Japanese said sharply, "No. Not yet."

He stepped over to the stand, picked up Nishu Benji's head by the black hair, and looked down at the stand, as if a message might have been placed underneath. A cigarette rolled to the matting, but that was all. Keiri Bassaku dropped the head. It fell with a thud and, like the cigarette, rolled a little.

A QUICK, belated search of the body disclosed nothing. When the Sheet of Luck was found on it, the Japanese crowded around, all reading that which they should have known by heart.

"There is nothing on it but the time and place of our meeting here," the oldest of the Japanese said; and Davies' immediate guess was that the ancient poem, containing almost every Japanese syllable, must be secretly marked in some manner. He didn't especially care now. What he did hope was that the old man, given time, would arrive at what was the one conclusion.

Again the American who had been so long in Japan was not mistaken.

Keiri Bassaku said to Suriga, "Send the maid about her affairs, and you go about your own. I need not tell that your life depends on silence, although you know all of us for what we are—"

"You are men of ancient families," said Suriga quickly, "and your fathers came to Number Nineteeen when my father was the manager, and—"

"I am going to borrow your pariah," snapped the old man.

I am the only messenger he can find, thought Lew, which was what he had been thinking before, and the reason the plotters had been originally interested in a liberated Ainu, who could go where he wished. *And he's got to find out what has happened, because of the whistle and the chant.*

There was a discussion when Keiri Bassaku announced that a carefully worded message of inquiry was to be sent to the Shinto shrine. Could the bearded pariah be trusted with it? Perhaps Keiri Bassaku himself should go. The foolish Americans might permit him to walk to the shrine; the Americans were gentle toward old men. Or perhaps the smallest of the party here could dress himself like an *otakari-uri* selling Sheets of Luck—one of which would be used for the coded message—and be allowed on the streets by the stupidly kind American guards who would think him a young fellow merely out too late? Or perhaps—

"No," said Keiri Bassaku.

He pounced on Koropok while Davies was congratulating himself and his perfect luck; he clawed at the pariah like a cat sharpening its nails; thus, in true Japanese style, beating down someone who was to be used. Davies did not dare protect himself, although he tried to roll his head. One of the vicious old man's fingers prodded at a corner of one of Lew's eyes, bringing bright blinding pain. Keiri Bassaku ended the typical threat—a warning as to what additional punishment could be expected

should the pariah fail in obedience—by raking all of the fingers from eye up to temple. The black wig, so carefully fastened down, began to give, first just slightly, and then . . .

Keiri Bassaku was shrieking, "What have we here?" when Koropok the Ainu flung him, with one terrific motion, against two of the other Japanese. The tattered figure of the pariah

Davies landed heavily on stones in the courtyard.

was out of the window before anyone else could shout or jump forward.

Again, Japanese were trapped by the unexpected.

Davies tried to twist around in mid-air, but landed heavily on the stones of the courtyard. He did not try to yell for the M. P.s at the gate as he jumped. It would have been better if he had, because head and shoulder struck together, and red and black sparks alternated before his dazed eyes. Even so, he managed to get to his kness before the Japanese came tearing out of Nineteen, and he could hear, although hazily, what they intended, which was to cut him off from the Americans at the gate.

Instead, looking more like Koropok the pariah than ever before, his face plastered with dirt, dust, and blood, Davies crawled for shadow, and then, limping as he ran, headed away from the gate toward the nauseous black canal bordering the northern portion of the licensed quarter.

There would be danger wherever sentries were posted. He knew that. And it was the Nips, not Davies, who knew the nearby posts.

These Japanese were desperate, and since they had already discussed ways by which they might be permitted on the streets at night, they would certainly try to do so now. Davies knew another fact: while the Japs would make every effort to get him before he could contact the American occupation authorities, other Wave-Men, without any delay or the wasting of a second of time, would, in desperation, take the word of what had happened to the Shinto shrine and Tadami-uchi.

The head priest, lord and motivating force of the fanatical Wave-Men, would immediately vanish . . . and continue to direct the assassins.

Davies went waist-deep into the canal. His feet squashed down in ooze. Foul smelling as it was, Davies cupped water in his hands and slapped it against his face until his head had cleared.

It doesn't make much difference if we've got a hundred thousand or a million men in Japan

—not to you, boy, Davies told himself grimly. *If the head priest is to be grabbed, it's your party.*

He had been utterly on his own all through the war; he did not mind being so now. The one important thing was to get to the Shinto shrine before Tadami-uchi disappeared . . . and Koropok the Ainu, better than any Japanese, knew all of the dark alleys which were the short cuts through Tokyo. When he had lived there as a pariah, other streets had been forbidden to him. So, now, the dim, filth-line passageways were familiar.

At this hour the narrow, angled ways along which Davies ran were deserted except for those cats which had escaped the cooking-pots, hordes of big bronze night flies, and an Ainu man and woman asleep against a filth-can.

THE sword which was worshiped in the Shinto shrine of which Tadami-uchi was the head priest was a famous one. This sword-*shintai,* according to tradition, had been found by an ancient samurai warrior in the tail of the Great Serpent. It was not a huge sword, and the handle was only of iron ornamented with inlaid silver threads, but the blade, resting on a piece of silver on the altar-stand, glittered like a slice of the moon. Priests spent whole nights tapping the steel with a tiny bag filled with polishing powder.

The *shintai* gleamed just to the left of Tadami-uchi, who squatted on his cushion in front of a semi-circle of the priests of the shrine.

In spite of earlier regulations, American officers had come to the shrine itself to question the priests. With them, acting as interpreters, were two Japanese-American sergeants. Colonel Humphreys, of G-2, was in charge. Sitting beside him, in silence, was an officer, whose single gold bar seemed to mark him as a second lieutenant, and whose breath came rapidly, as if he had been running.

This officer's uniform was ill-fitting. The sleeves were too long, and the suntan blouse too tight across shoulders and chest.

Davies had seen the cars drive up just as he dashed toward the courtyard. He had been lucky in that the sentries posted under the *torii* of the gateway had snapped to attention as the officers had been driven up, otherwise he might have been shot.

His first question, when answered, told him that G-2, in desperation, had started again at the scene of the first of the murders—the shrine; his second question had resulted in the removal of his wig and beard with the assistance of a belt first aid kit, and the transfer to Davies of the uniform of the second lieutenant who had been with the investigator. The latter, shivering, was driven back to Headquarters, and swiftly.

Before entering the shrine, Davies had told the colonel, "What we've got to watch is the old banzai charge. That's what the spirit of the Wave-Men has turned out to be. It's the idea that death doesn't matter if you achieve your vengeance."

A quick look around had shown Davies how small the group of Intelligence officers really was. Even so, it was pretty fine for the man who had been on his own for so long, to be backed by and be a part of the United States forces. It felt good to be in uniform, even one as badly fitting as the lieutenant's. And there was a splendid feeling in sitting opposite the plotting priests and to know that the plot was going to fail.

Tadami-uchi had greeted the Americans graciously enough. Davies had almost grinned when the head priest, the servant of the war god, had spoken of peace. He did not speak at all, nor did he interrupt obvious lies when Tadami-uchi expressed horror and surprise, even now, when reminded of the head which had been frozen in the font in the courtyard.

What the head priest offered was, thoughtfully, "Possibly that dead man caused the jealousy of a woman? I have heard stories about his households, something which we, here in the shrine, frown upon."

Davies, briefly, thought of the shrine's dancing-maids.

This fencing had not gone on for more than a few minutes when a Japanese slid softly into the chamber, not by the main door, but, Davies supposed, probably through the priest's passageway itself. It was the thin, boy-sized Japanese who had been a guest at Number Nineteen. He bobbed his head, dropped on all fours, and approached Tadami-uchi. As he sidled over the matting, his eyes fastened with venom on the two Nisei sergeants . . .

He knows they'll understand Japanese, thought Lew, amused, *and he knows he's got to be careful.*

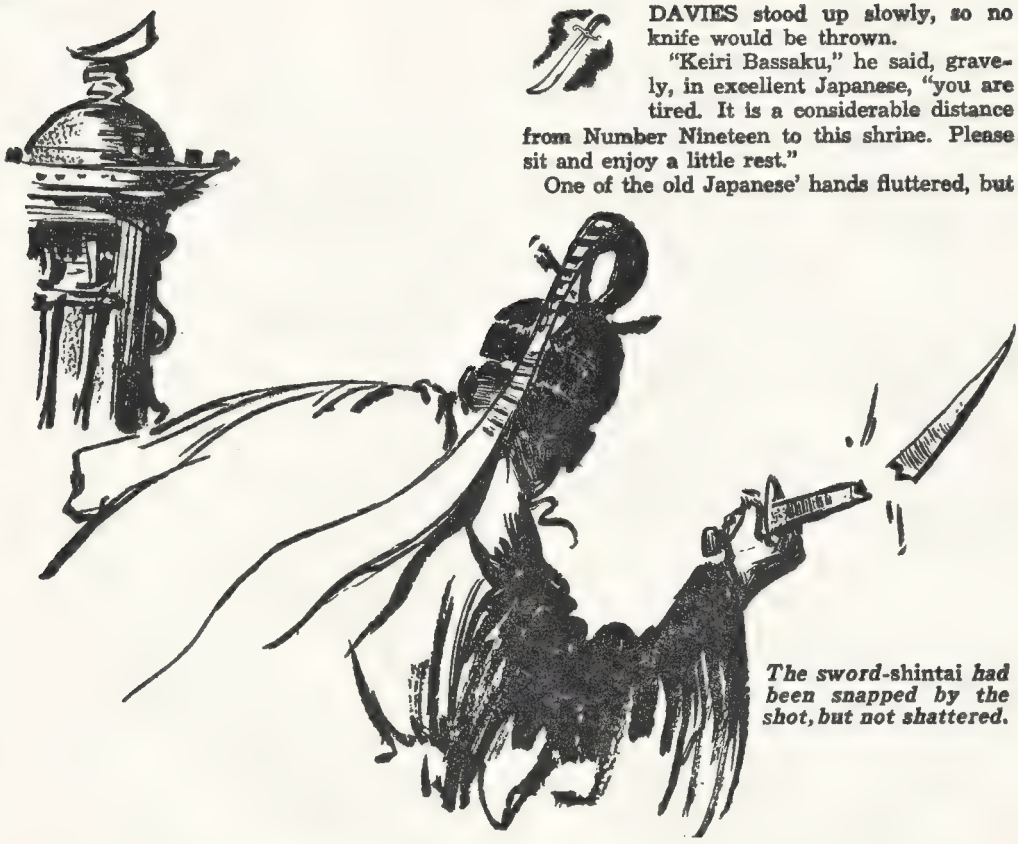
The wiry Japanese finally choked out, "A sacred *shintai,* the goddess-mirror, has fallen, oh, lord. Please come and recite prayers before it, or something terrible will happen."

Not bad, decided Lew, while one of the sergeants softly translated what had just been said. *It would have worked. Tadami-uchi would have gotten away.*

"Inform your masters what I must do," the head priest threw at the sergeants, as he stood up ponderously, his robes hissing around him.

"Tell him to put his fat bottom back on the cushion," growled Colonel Humphreys, and Davies' eyes glistened as the sergeant proceeded to furnish Tadami-uchi with an exact translation.

There was a rustling of robes as the priests moved slightly. Every beady stare was fastened on a separate American; here and there



*The sword-*shintai *had been snapped by the shot, but not shattered.*

DAVIES stood up slowly, so no knife would be thrown.

"Keiri Bassaku," he said, gravely, in excellent Japanese, "you are tired. It is a considerable distance from Number Nineteen to this shrine. Please sit and enjoy a little rest."

One of the old Japanese' hands fluttered, but a hand slipped up a sleeve, so that Davies, and most of the G-2 officers, knew that the priests were armed.

The chamber was silent. Behind the priests was the raised sanctuary, now empty of the sword-*shintai* which was beside the big head priest. Offerings stood on the high altar, bronze perfume burners, handfuls of rice in bowls, miniature wooden swords and daggers. A long white scroll hung motionless.

The shrine was so still now that approaching footsteps made a frightful sound. Into the room came old Keiri Bassaku, almost tottering. The wizened Japanese froze stiff as he saw the two semicircles of silent men.

Davies' mouth barely moved as he said, "It's coming. The banzai charge." He, and the Americans who expected it, heard the soft thrumming of cars approaching the shrine. "Maybe I can hold it up a sec'," said Lew.

A second . . . a minute . . . enough to change the odds. That might do it. If not—well, it would be bad. Bad because Americans would be killed here, and priests would be killed and a shrine violated. Much could be made of it, at home and in Japan and throughout the Far East.

he gave no other sign of astonishment. He, like all Japanese, was caught by the unexpected. His old eyes saw an *Amerika-jin* officer, short, dark, erect . . . and, Japanese-fashion again, he was unable to refrain from, "How did you know?"

When Davies remained silent, Keiri Bassaku shot at him, "You have been listening to lies!" which meant that the American had believed what a pariah, or a person disguised as a pariah, might have said.

In clipped Ainu dialect, Davies mumbled, in the voice of Koropok, "*N'ma b'y'o wa o-kiz' n' mot'*. Were the lies your lies?"

The wiry Japanese screamed, "Koropok!"

He was leaping up at Davies while he shouted. Lew's short, savage blow pounded in an uppercut just as the Japanese' knife flashed out.

Tadami-uchi had heard enough to guess the rest. With one hand he produced a tiny shining whistle, which was almost lost in his thick lips as he blew wildly on it; with the other hand he grasped the sword-*shintai*. One huge hand began to swing it in a great arc of light.

Davies saw it coming, but had not guessed that a priest would employ the sacred weapon.

He saw the streak of white-and-silver lightning and, in the same split second as death was presenting itself to him, he knew the lengths to which Tadami-uchi and his Wave-Men would go.

But if the sword were the lightning of the war god, a revolver shot became the thunder, to fill the chamber and set the scroll to trembling, so that the characters on it changed form.

The priests were on their feet; knives were out. None darted from brown hands, however, because the great door had been flung open, and the Shintoists became immobile as they saw the soldiers with whom the lieutenant had returned come swarming in.

The sword-*shintai* had been snapped by the shot, but not shattered. Tadami-uchi continued to grip the handle.

Keiri Bassaku shrilled. "Use what blade remains, lord! Perform *seppuku* honorably." A despairing plea of, "Swiftly, lord!" did not cause the head priest to recover the last of his honor by disemboweling himself.

Davies' first thought was, *Let him!* but that would have brought about questions concerning the death of a priest. So, with one fluid motion, he had the bulging sword arm of the ponderous head priest pinioned. It was like squeezing fat. There was no strength in the gigantic arm when death called to Tadami-uchi.

"A coward," Davies said in Japanese. "A leader of Ronin? No!"

That does it, realized Davies. *He's got no face left. No honor. No anything. He's through. So are the Wave-Men, because you can't swear not to live under the same heaven as the enemies of your lord when your lord is a bust.*

Proof of what Lew was reasoning became apparent from the manner in which the old Japanese, and the younger one, and even the priests, hid their shamed faces in their hands. They, too, were dishonored and disgraced by the cowardly action of Tadami-uchi, who should have shown them the way to honor.

Colonel Humphreys said, "Well! You've got to explain most of it to me, Major. I never saw anything like this in my life."

"It took me a good many years in Japan to understand it myself," said Lew. He went on quietly, "This ends my duty here, sir? I'm all finished?"

"You certainly are!"

"May I drive a car when we return, sir?"

"Good Lord, yes. All of 'em! We're damn grateful to you, Major."

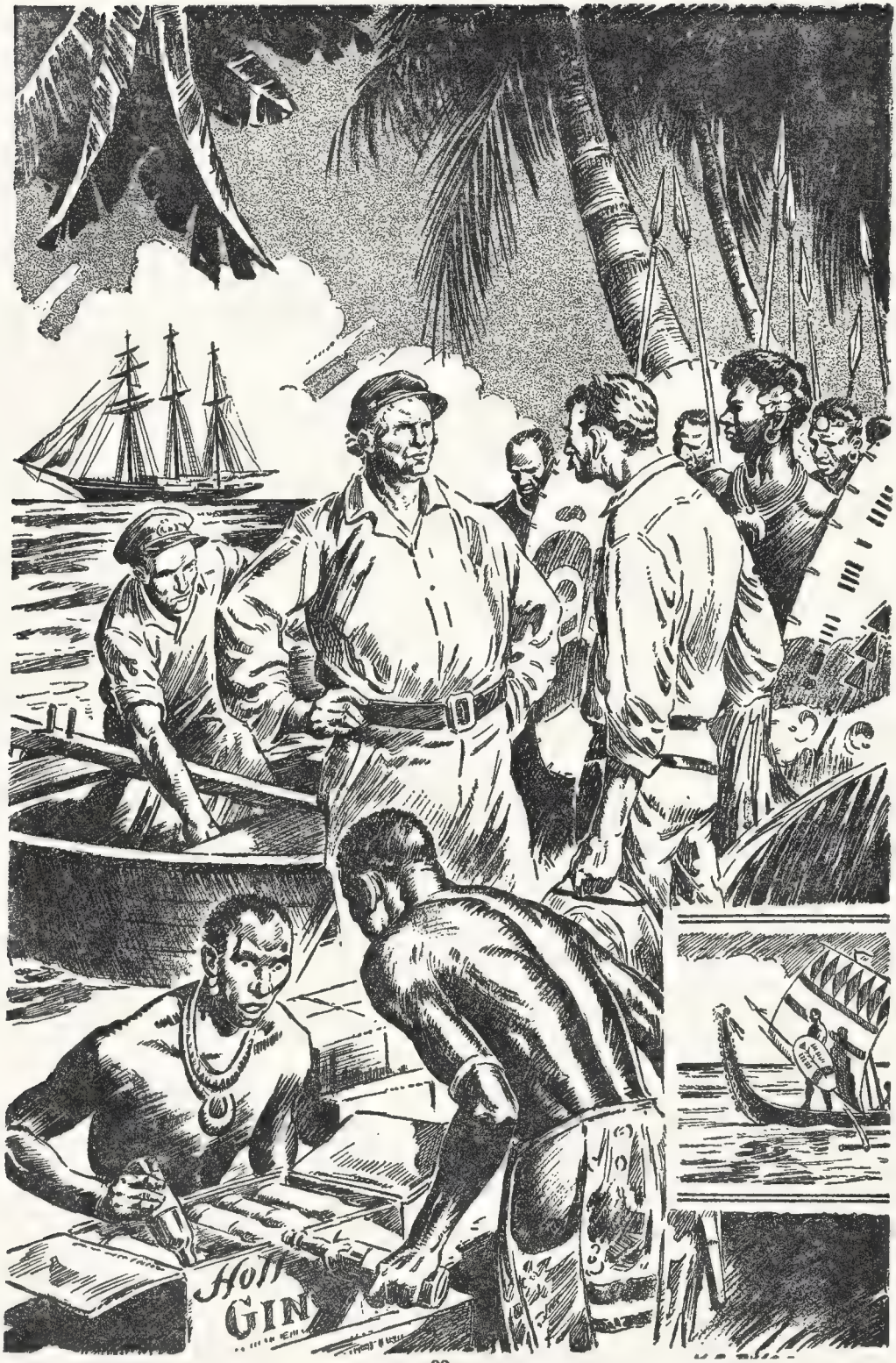
"You see, sir," said Lew, giving his shirt a loosening yank, "when I'm back in the States, I hope to go out with a gal, and I haven't driven a car since the first bomb was dropped."

The G-2 officer nodded absently. He said, thinking aloud while the soldiers waited for orders, "No sense in arresting the priests now, is there? They'll behave, even if they're not on our side. We'll not have any more Nips murdered when they try to work with us, will we?"

"No more," agreed Davies.

Colonel Humphreys said, "Take any car you want. Anybody's. Mine." With a hand on Lew's shoulders, he asked, "Is there anything else, Major?"

"Yes." Davies paused and began to smile. "Yes. There's something else. I want to go home."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GIN

THE BETRAYAL OF BULKHEAD BEAN

ILLUSTRATED BY V. E. PYLES

By ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN

WE WERE close to Banks Island, off the coast of Bougainville, and the wind died just as dawn broke that morning. As steering way fell off, the *Willywaw* started to roll heavily on the slick, green swell. Normally we'd have started the auxiliary, but we were low on oil and decided to wait. It was sticky hot with a low, leaden sky and, like Captain Bulkhead Bean—me being his first mate—I'd spent the night on the poop trying to sleep, so getting up was just a matter of climbing off the mattress and pouring a bucket of warm seawater over my head. Bulkhead's heavy carcass lay sprawled on a mattress, too, wearing only rumpled pajamas and grunting wrathfully as he tried to swat a stray mosquito that had winged off-shore.

"Y'know, Pete," he said, giving a final triumphant swat, "I used to trade 'round these parts once. Afore your time." He rolled over and lifted himself a little to blink at the sullen green line of the nearby coast. "We'll be about off Shark Cove, and if I ain't mistaken we're having visitors." I took a look through the glasses and picked up the speck coming toward us.

"Couple of natives and a white in an outrigger," I affirmed. "I didn't know there was a trader around here."

"There ain't," Bulkhead grunted. "Leastways there wasn't. Nothing to trade for and the natives are too damned lazy to work a plantation. Maybe it's a missionary."

But it was far from being a missionary. The canoe eased alongside and a wizened, little, ragbearded man in dirty ducks clawed over the barkentine's rail, and stood panting a while, fanning himself with a battered sun helmet. He was barefooted and he needed a bath, and from his watery, bloodshot eyes and thin nose shot with purple veins, it was a safe bet he was beach-combing and not a long way from going entirely native.

We went inshore and landed the gin and other goods. A few dozen natives swarmed around, picked up the cases and trotted away under Jeremiah's profane directions.

"The name is Martin," he gasped, in a mild and surprisingly educated voice. He regained his breath and grew a little pompous. "Jeremiah Van Martin, sir, late of the Sydney bar. Now legal adviser, accountant and justice of the peace for King Wanga, paramount chief of Banks Island, as acknowledged by the sovereign Commonwealth of Australia in the year of grace—" He stopped as he saw Bulkhead reach for a stray hatch wedge to throw, and ended lamely, "In short, sir, I have come to make your fortune. I could probably explain better after a drink."

Bulkhead was unimpressed. The islands are full of beachcombers who will make your fortune or give you their right arm for a drink. "I guess," said Bulkhead wearily, "you just got the snakes. Give him a bottle, Pete, and toss him over the rail."

"For a consideration," the other wheezed, "I am prepared to deal with you regarding a matter of pearl shell, gold-lip shell, at present lying safely inside Shark Cove."

Bulkhead grunted and ran his thick fingers through his mop of grizzled hair. Heaving his big frame off his mattress, he bit off the end of a cigar and spat. "There ain't no shell in Shark Cove," he said flatly. "There used to be a patch, but Bud Harris and me cleaned it out years ago. Shove off, chum."

Jeremiah Van Martin held up a protesting hand. "The shell I allude to, sir, is in a ship's hold, the brig *Mary Anne* to be exact, at present lying on the bottom and beyond all hope of salvage."

"Was she yours?" I asked, and he favored me with a sad look and some further explanation.

"I regret, sir, she was not. Nor do I know who owned her. There may be papers in her main cabin, but I doubt it. She drifted through the main channel some time ago, after a bad gale. Dismasted and sinking. No sign of any crew. And she foundered before I could—er—make any thorough investigation. However, I did obtain some specimens."

He looked over the rail and called to the natives in the outrigger who passed up a basket which he handed to Bulkhead with a polite bow. "Did you ever see finer shell?" he asked reverently. Bulkhead was so intent pawing it over he hardly noticed when the visitor deftly relieved him of a spare cigar in his pajama pocket.

"That's pickings, Pete," Bulkhead said admiringly. "Ought to bring a fancy price in 'Stralia." He looked up suddenly and demanded, "How much is there?"

Jeremiah Van Martin took his cigar out long enough to say, "Full cargo, sir," and went on puffing luxuriously. Probably his first good smoke in months. Bulkhead ruffled his grizzled hair again and looked at me.

I shrugged. "Must belong to someone," I observed. "Better go easy. Why hasn't our chum here handled it himself?" Jeremiah waved his cigar, wiped his rag-beard and beamed.

"A natural question," he agreed with dignity. "The stuff's too deep in the water for me to dive for it, and the natives won't work. Regrettable, but they have no use for shell. Not even gold-lip. And then, of course, there is a sad lack of shipping to get the stuff to market. No vessels call at Shark Cove any more, so the cargo must be disposed of as best it can. I trust I make myself clear, sir." He grew even more dignified. "Shall we proceed to business?"

Bulkhead frowned. "Maybe I'll have my boys dive for a squint at this wreck," he conceded. "But what's this consideration you talked about? I ain't in the pearling game right now and it's a long haul to a decent market. Then again cash is pretty tight these times and anyway I got a Navy charter waiting at Port Ducas—" I stopped him before he could deliver his full pre-bargaining speech.

"You better forget it," I said uneasily. "Sure as fate there's a ringer somewhere, and Lord knows what legal tangles you'll run into."

"That," interrupted Jeremiah Van Martin, "is where I come in, sir, as representing King Wanga."

He produced a sheet of sweat-stained, rumpled paper, straightened it out with shaky fingers, coughed and read impressively, "This document hereby awards to its owner all rights to flotsam and jetsam found in Shark Cove, or cast up on the beaches thereof; and all rights to abandoned vessels or wreckage of same found drifting or sunk, together with any cargoes they may contain." He waved a dirty hand and chewed on his cigar a moment. "That, sir, stripped of sundry superficial legal verbiage, just about covers the subject. All I have to do, sir, is fill in your name. This title is duly signed by King Wanga and by the native village constable, the same making their mark which I have duly witnessed."

I had to laugh. "If that paper's any good as a title, then I'm a dead shark," I said. "It's as full of holes as your shirt, and if I recall correctly no native can hand over a hunk of territory and rights like that without the consent of a civil affairs officer."

But I was wasting time. Bulkhead was turning the gold-lip over and over, and from the angelic look on his shiny, broad face I knew he was already selling tons of the stuff in the Brisbane market.

"Now, now, Pete," he murmured. "You want to let such pickings slide away? And anyway who's going to ask questions about a crummy spot like Shark Cove?"

"Maybe the Navy up at Port Ducas—where we're due," I reminded him. "They'll have a cutter down here poking around as soon as they

get word of a wrecked ship. They've probably got it already by bush telegraph at that."

Jeremiah Van Martin waved expansively and breathed cigar smoke in my face. "Your fears are groundless, young man. As an experienced barrister—in Sydney, did I tell you?—I assure you that title will be upheld in any court in Australasia."

I shrugged and shut up. With Bulkhead still drooling over the gold-lip in his paws, it was useless to argue, and there was some truth in his saying that no one was likely to worry about what went on in Shark Cove. The outer islands swelter along pretty much by themselves. Then Jeremiah produced another paper. "This," he coughed, "is a list of the considerations. Say ten cases of gin; the—er—king was quite insistent on that item. Six cases of tinned salmon, six bully beef . . ." He rambled on, sounding like a trader ordering a two-year supply, and finally Bulkhead took him below to argue.

When the pair of them emerged some time later, Bulkhead had the title in one hand and from the way his arm was around the little man's shoulder I knew he was feeling very pleased with himself and had been working on a bottle. Jeremiah certainly had, for I had to help him overside to his canoe, which started shorewards while he drooped happily over the side, two extra bottles stuck in his pockets. Bulkhead had dressed while he'd been below and was bubbling with business.

"Get the whaleboat over, Pete," he ordered. "We'll take a dekko at the prospects."

"Do we take the cased goods, too?" I asked sourly. "From the looks of that list he was running off we'll have to strip the ship."

"I ain't gone quite balmy," said Bulkhead. "I holystoned him down to his proper load line. But the blasted old fake's obstinate on some things."

"Such as what?" I said, feeling pretty sore at all this nonsense.

"Such as gin," Bulkhead stated. "Couldn't budge him lower than six cases. Which is going to leave me short. If it was anything but gold-lip I'd see him blistered before I'd drop six cases on the beach. If I wasn't honest anyway I'd lift the shell and let him sweat, seeing he left me the title by mistake, anyway. Anyone who hands over titles before he's paid ought to be cooked."

SO WE loaded the whaleboat and took six boys and pulled into Shark Cove, where the jagged stumps of the brig's masts stuck just above the low tide. We dropped the boat anchor and sent the boys down. The shell specimens they brought up made Bulkhead glow all over again.

"Full near to the deck beams," he purred.

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"Maybe three hundred ton. Maybe four, eh? I guess we'll pay the old chum off after all."

So we went inshore and landed the gin and other goods. A few dozen grinning natives swarmed around and picked up the cases and trotted away under Jeremiah's profane and somewhat muddled directions. The last we saw of him, that time, he was weaving triumphantly off into the jungle behind his carriers and singing at the top of his voice. I felt pretty disgusted.

"It's likely the fanciest deal I ever landed," said Bulkhead comfortably, as we started back for the *Willywaw* to fix things for real diving. "Four, maybe five hundred tons of gold-lip. Maybe six hundred, Pete. All for a boatload of cheap supplies and twenty quid in cash. What'll the boys say when they hear? Ain't no one can beat Bulkhead Bean when it comes to trading."

"If they hear you let loose of twenty quid hard cash they'll say the sun finally got you," I observed. "And don't crow yet." I pointed at the main channel and Bulkhead's eyes popped as he saw what I did, a ship's longboat coming toward us with a white man steering and eight sweating Kanakas at the oars.

"This," I said, almost gratefully, "is where the ringer comes in. Want to bet?" But Bulkhead only scratched his neck and muttered under his breath as we drew level with the stranger. If the stranger wasn't quite as surprised as Bulkhead was, he was certainly madder.

"What the hell!" he rasped as his Kanakas backed water. "What the hell are you doing here?" His boat stopped close enough so he could see over our gunnels and his leathery, hatchet face grew livid as he saw the specimens of gold-lip on our bottom boards. "You damned pirates! Looting around my wreck! That shell's mine. Get out afore I run you out!"

He meant it, too. His little black eyes were murderous and when he got his long and unbelievably skinny body on its feet and pushed back his jacket we saw he was wearing a gunbelt. "Get out of my cove!" he roared. "And make it fast!"

He put a hand on his gun butt and Bulkhead let out a vast sigh and reached for a cigar, very carefully so it could not be thought he was reaching for a gun, too. He was thinking fast and he needed time. Finally he jerked his head at the name *Red Swallow* painted on the other boat, and waved his cigar.

"I guess you're Captain Towser," he said mildly. "Owning that fat lugger we saw in Ducas Bay last trip. I heard you was a mite tongue-tied and sort of hasty. And I might say you're looking at the owner of Shark Cove. If you put about right now you'll save your boys some work pulling against the flood tide. Me, I'm Bulkhead Bean and I don't get chased off my own deals."

The other man laughed sarcastically. "There's always a first time," he said. "I've heard a man could render a hogshead of lard from the blubber you carry. I'd figure it more like two. And they told me Bulkhead Bean was the biggest wind outside of a typhoon and not too particular where he gets cargoes. I can see it now. But toss the shell in my boat and I'll let you run for it." He jerked his gun and waved it around. "I can shoot the ears off a jumping wallaby, Bulkhead, so make it fast." The Kanakas in both boats began to look uneasy and rolled their eyes, ready to dive overside when the shooting started.

"Hold on," I said hastily, unshipping the tiller as a club, just in case. "The captain just told you he's owner of Shark Cove. He's got a title to the shell, so where do you come in?"

Captain Towser stared at me for a moment and I thought he was going to try for *my* ears. But finally, with an oath, he jerked a paper out of his pocket and slapped it against his thigh. "This is my claim, mate! All signed and legal—" I saw the light then and checked him.

"Carrying King Wanga's mark, and the village constable's mark, and witnessed by Jeremiah Van Martin," I said dryly. "So he's working all hands."

Captain Towser's jaw dropped a little and some of the belligerency went out of him. "Meaning what?" he demanded. "How'd you know about Van Martin?"

Bulkhead chewed on his cigar and from the vast sigh he gave I knew he was seeing a way out.

"Meaning, mister," he said gently, "I got that sort of title, too." His broad face was placid and his storm-gray eyes very wide and innocent, so I knew he figured the situation was in hand, and the shooting talk finished. "Maybe we could get hold of Jeremiah and kick his teeth in," he suggested. "And then we could make some sort of a deal."

Towser looked at him, then at me, and then around the cove, and relaxed a little, stowing his gun away.

"I make no deal," he said acidly. "You're the bloke that's stuck. I got my title six days back when I stopped in here for water. I saw that pot-bellied barkentine of yours lying becalmed off here, and seeing she wasn't here when I left to get fresh supplies, I take it you just met this Jeremiah, which makes my title first."

"It wouldn't," said Bulkhead blandly, "be dated by any chance? Mine ain't."

"Well, mine ain't either," Towser muttered uncertainly. "But you'll admit mine was first and that makes the shell my salvage."

Bulkhead scratched the back of his neck and said, "Does it?"

"You might try and grab Van Martin," I

put in, beginning to enjoy myself. "Like Bulkhead suggested. Let him settle it."

"If you think I'm going wading through that damned jungle looking for a lousy beachcomber, you're balmy," Towser snarled. "Being smart as he thinks he is he'll have skipped anyway. He cost me four cases of gin and a bunch of other stuff, and I paid him ten quid cash. When I pay for something I collect."

Bulkhead grunted. "Quite a mess," he agreed amiably. "Seeing there ain't no dates on 'em, my title's as good as yours and that's how she stands. And what's more, mister, I think we're both stuck bad, because I just recollected about this time of the year the rips start running in the Cove here so bad you can't operate boats. I forgot that when Jeremiah touched me."

Towser gave a short laugh and looked at the main channel, smooth and placid. "You're full of wind all right, Bulkhead. There's no rips I can see and there weren't any when I was here afore. Try another tack. I salvage and that's that!" I thought Bulkhead's bluff was pretty feeble myself but he stuck to it.

"Have it your way," he said. "But don't say I didn't give you warning. The rips is something awful." He nodded at me and I waved our boys to start pulling and we headed out for the main channel.

Towser stood there in his stern sheets and stared after us, obviously puzzled that we'd given way so easily. He even fumbled uncertainly at his gun again and roared after us, "Hey! You listen!" but Bulkhead only closed his eyes and yawned and paid no attention. When I looked back Towser was rubbing his cheek with his gun muzzle and was anchoring over the wreck, his boys getting ready to dive.

"Well," I said shortly, "looks like the great trader Bulkhead Bean outsmarted himself for once. You're licked. Just as well, maybe. The deal was crazy from the start."

Bulkhead opened his eyes and chuckled. "Maybe yes, and maybe no. Towser ain't got me bilged yet. There's ways and means, and I'm out considerable stores and some hard cash."

"Look, Bulkhead," I pointed out—starting to feel sorry for him, because he wasn't often licked and somewhere inside his carcass he did have a certain pride—"we're just wasting more money sticking around. We've got a good charter at a hundred quid a week, over expenses, starting as soon as we get to Ducas and start loading. Let's kick the auxiliary over and maybe we can run into a wind before we run out of oil. Get away from Shark Cove anyhow."

"Pete," he said, shaking his head, "sometimes I wonder why I pay you to mismanage the *Willywaw*. Worst mate I ever had. I'm as hopping mad as a wet cat. Six cases of gin and, Pete"—his voice grew tremulous with feeling—"you know what I forked over in cash besides. Twenty quid! That blasted beachcomber stuck me two more cases and ten quid more than he stuck Towser. I don't figure on letting that haunt me for the rest of my life." He chewed on his cigar and squinted reflectively over the sea. "Besides, Pete, there's still the shell. Gold-lip loaded to the deck beams. Maybe six, seven hundred ton. The pickings, Pete. And anyway I don't like the way Towser talks."

"That's mutual," I observed, "so let's drop the whole business. It stinks."

"That," said Bulkhead obstinately, "ain't the point. The point is I collect from Shark Cove. And for a starter, Pete, just stick the tiller to starboard."

"The ship's off to port," I reminded him acidly. "Maybe you've gone balmy after all. Or d'you want to do a little reef fishing?"

"Very near the mark," he conceded. "I want to run along the reef while I recollect a few things. I did some diving here with Bud Harris once, like I said. But just ease along and I'll show you."

It didn't make sense to me but I put the tiller over and ran the boat parallel with the

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reef, a maze of rock and coral that stood several feet above the sea at all but the highest tides. It ran almost entirely across the mouth of Shark Cove which was nestled, at the mouth, between high cliffs. The main channel at one end was fairly wide and deep, but the channel at the other end was shallow and narrow, and ran beneath an overhang of rock that seemed ready to fall any minute. Bulkhead jerked a thumb.

"That's Bud Harris' and my doing," he stated. "Meaning that channel. Like I said, we cleaned out the shell way back, but we had quite a time until we'd done some figuring, because there *were* bad rips in the Cove. So we eased things by blasting out this upper channel here. Now supposing someone blasted that rock overhang down, why, it'd foul the channel again and that'd be pretty sad for Captain Towser. Anyway it's worth a try." It was.

WE STOOD on the *Willywaw's* poop next morning, after a hard night's work discreetly blasting, the noise mostly smothered by the surf roar. The main channel was now a swirling torrent no small boat would care to run, with all the tide trying to crowd through the one opening. Towser's lugger was lying becalmed some miles down the coast, having been caught as we had by the dying wind the previous dawn. Soon after daylight we saw his longboat pull up to the channel mouth and check hurriedly—in fact they were having a hard time trying not to get sucked into the rough water. From the way Towser stood up and waved his arms, he was pretty mad and probably swearing his head off. Bulkhead bit the end off a fresh cigar and looked happy.

"That bloke," he stated, "is ready to sell out right now for a busted shark egg. You'll see."

We didn't have to wait long. Towser's boat came swinging out to us after a while and whatever mental anguish had torn his soul he had apparently recovered. There was even a smile crinkling his hatchet face and he looked almost human.

"Bulkhead," he stated when he boarded, "I apologize, and you were right. The rips in Shark Cove are pretty impossible. Even an hour's slack water would hardly give a man time to salvage anything worth while." He mopped his face and stared around. "Pity you forgot conditions when that beachcomber hit you up."

"Well, that's the way it goes," Bulkhead agreed. "I was just absent-minded. Been so long since I worked 'round these parts. Anything on your mind?"

"Well, yes," Towser admitted. "I thought maybe if you wanted to hang around and gamble a bit more, you'd care to take over my title. I see you carry an auxiliary engine so maybe with a ship this size you could get into the Cove. My little lugger wouldn't have a chance. How you feel about it?" He pulled out his title paper and slapped it. "Yours for ten quid, and the gold-lips yours if you can lift it, and no one to argue with at all."

"I dunno," said Bulkhead dubiously. "Why should I buy if you're going to quit anyway? And how do I know I can get any shell either?"

"Well, that's the gamble," Towser admitted. "But if you do and your title isn't clear—well, I might put in a claim."

"I see your point," Bulkhead admitted. "Suppose we talk it over." So the two of them went below and gammed around for an hour. Bulkhead finally settled for seven quid and got the title, and a very sad man he seemed as Towser pushed off back to his lugger. "You got the best of the bargain, mister," said Bulkhead, waving. "But I was always one to take an extra chance."

"Sure," said Towser kindly as his boat slid away. "Anyone who can start funny tide rips just on a notion ought to take a lot of chances. You've got one this time, Bulkhead. And to show my appreciation I'll tell you something. Rip or no rip if you get any more than a couple of tons of shell out of the *Mary Anne* you're a marvel. I suppose Jeremiah told you she was full to the deck beams. So my boys thought at first. But when they got in some steady diving and had time to paw around, funny thing—the shell only went down a layer or two. Fore and aft that brig's loaded with copra, and you know what salt water does to copra!"

Bulkhead clung to the poop rail and went pale. "Meaning what?" he managed.

Towser laughed. "Meaning we both fell for an old trick, mate. The beachcomber's own divers found a few tons of shell in one hold and just spread it over the copra in the others. So we thought it was a full cargo all right. They worked that one on me in the Paumotus thirty years back, but I'd forgotten—just like you did about that fancy rip. Thanks for the seven quid. With the shell I did get that'll about clear me."

I said, "Well, I suppose now we blow the upper channel clear again and go in and dive? You might as well get a good lesson while you're about it."

He groped for a cigar and choked. It couldn't happen to Bulkhead Bean. But it had and he was badly upset. "Pete," he said at last, very belligerent, "sure we go in! We pick up the shell. How the hell do I know but what Towser's lying? He's sore and maybe just talking. Anyway, there ought to be enough gold-lip left to clear me, too."

I didn't even try to argue that time. And I had to admit maybe Towser had been lying. So we took a boat away, sent some boys down and blew clear again the small channel we had blocked, so the tide could get in and out with-

out too much fuss. Then we took the *Willywaw* into Shark Cove, anchored her near the wreck, got the boats over and started the boys diving. Three dives were enough to check Towser's report. The *Mary Anne* was copra-full with only a top layer of shell. Bulkhead winced when he got the news, but he tried to make the best of it.

"Should be two or three ton left anyway," he mumbled doggedly. "And we might find a few things in the cabins and spots, once the boys start looking around." I said nary a word and he took to staring owl-eyed at the water, chewing on his cigar, and thinking whatever dark thoughts he was thinking. The boys were sending up baskets pretty full of shell for a while, and I began to think maybe we'd clean up enough after all to pay expenses and a bit over. But then it started to peter out and soon we were getting lumps of water-rotted copra with every other shell. I was going to suggest we wind up the whole business and get to sea again, as there were signs of a wind coming up, when several curious things happened—the first of them being the whale.

WE HAD advance notice of that from the flocks of screaming gulls that swooped and dived and pecked at a black mass of something out off the reef. Then we got a whiff of the smell, which is pretty unmistakable. And then it came drifting in the channel with the flood tide, just as the wrecked *Mary Anne* had—a very dead whale of at least sixty tons, already bloating up with gases and riding high as an empty ship. Bulkhead swore as it floated by us, majestic and overpowering, making the whaleboat we were sitting in bob violently from the side-wash.

"Big bull sperm from the looks of it," Bulkhead observed sourly. "Maybe got sick or in a fight. Ain't going to be any living with that on the beach, Pete, so maybe we'd better get the hook up and clear." He dabbed idly at the water, picked something up, scowled at it for a second, and then absent-mindedly put it in his pocket, his mind still brooding on his troubles.

The whale drifted to the shore and I ordered the Kanakas to quit work and get back on board. The wind was working up all right and I had a good feeling we'd be bowling along before it soon and on our way to Port Ducas where our real business was anyway. Then, just as I was about to hoist anchor and start the auxiliary, the cutter came in.

"All right," said Bulkhead sourly when I opened my mouth. "You don't need to rub it in. So here comes the Navy and a lot of questions."

He sat on the poop rail, chewing moodily at his cigar, as a very bronzed, very bored, and largely undressed young lieutenant of the Royal Australian Navy came aboard with—of all men—Towser, looking very jovial and contented. We'd met the lieutenant once or twice before and he was very cynical about Bulkhead Bean.

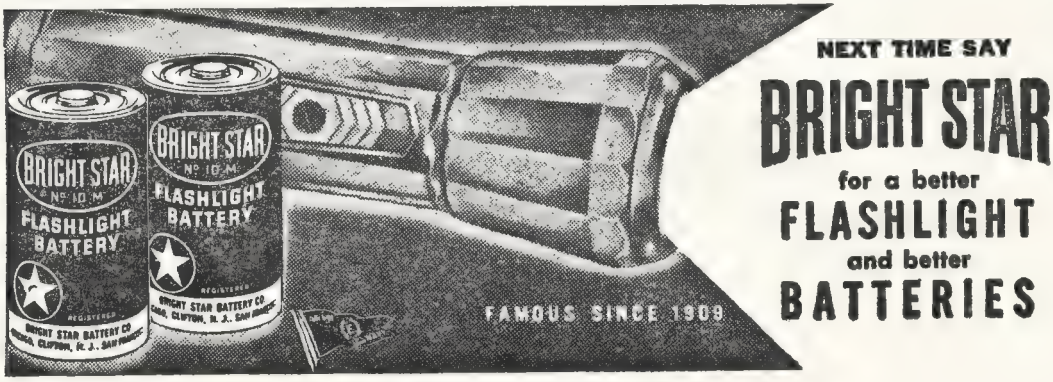
"Never mind the blarney, Skipper," he drawled. "I got most of the story out of Captain Towser here, who's probably lying, too. Had word at the base about the wreck anyway. Owner and crew picked up and landed at Port Moresby."

Bulkhead managed a kind smile. "That's good news, mister," he agreed. "Shipwrecked mariners should always be saved. I was—er—just poking around to see what was what." He stared hard-eyed at Towser, who grinned and spread his hands.

"The cutter stopped by my packet," he explained, "and I came along to help out about the titles and all that. And to warn him about that bad rip, which seems to come and go." He shrugged. "Tough luck all around. The owner said to sell the *Mary Anne* for whatever the wreck would bring. Since no one's bought it, it's just a straight salvage job."

"You got about three ton of shell, eh?" observed the lieutenant, yawning and inspecting what we had piled on deck. "That's O.K., Bulkhead. You just deliver it to base and I guess you'll rate a percentage. Bring up any other valuables?"

"A busted chronometer," Bulkhead snarled.



"And half a ton of rotten copra. Want them delivered, too?"

"Just the shell," said the lieutenant amiably. "I've got to shove off and settle some trouble at Bream's Point, but I suppose I can trust you to land the shell." He sniffed suddenly, stared around, and sniffed again. "What the hell's that? You got any unburied dead aboard?"

"Whale," I said shortly. "On the beach. Pretty far gone."

The lieutenant stuck his nose in a handkerchief. "I was going to stay for a drink," he said, "but never mind. See you at base, Bulkhead."

Captain Towser patted Bulkhead's arm and jerked his head toward the shore. "There's more salvage for you, mate," he said kindly. "Your title covers all grounded stuff. Nice pickings!"

Neither of us said anything as Towser went off with the lieutenant and the cutter slid out to sea again. Then Bulkhead flung his half-chewed cigar overside and let the language go. "Pete," he said at last, running thick fingers through his grizzled hair, "next time I get fancy trading ideas you just wrap a belaying pin round my blasted neck. I'm all through—"

His jaw dropped and automatically he scratched the back of his neck. "Pete," he said, almost whispering, "maybe I got the snakes myself!" I looked where he was staring and almost fell over the rail. For sliding out of some hidden creek in the mangroves was an outrigger canoe, and large as life Jeremiah Van Martin was hailing us. I suppose he'd just been waiting for the Navy to clear out, but even at that he had his crust. Even Bulkhead had to admit it.

"I'm sort of beginning to like that bloke," he grunted finally. "He's not only got nerve but he gets results. Me and Towser together first, and now he's back for more. Tuppence to a baked emu it's another deal and I'm in the middle."

He was, as it turned out. Jeremiah Van Martin came on board with a flourish and from the looks of him he'd been hard at work on some of his liquid profits. He wasn't exactly hiccoughing, but he was very careful about walking, and when he stopped he spread his bare feet to make sure he remained upright.

"I have the honor, sir," he started, "to represent King Wanga in another slight matter that has come to his attention." He coughed as the whale smell drifted over the barkentine again. "That—er—pollution on the beach."

Bulkhead drew in a deep breath. "And what," he asked gently, "is on your mind now, mister?"

"On His Majesty's mind," the other corrected, taking hold of a backstay for security. "His Majesty wishes that pollution removed from Shark Cove. Your title states, sir, that you own all that drifts and is stranded on the shores of this noble harbor. Therefore it is your responsibility that anything which may be injurious to the health of King Wanga's subjects be fitly and speedily removed."

Bulkhead swayed a little and his throat started to swell but he recovered. He had had two or three body blows already but this was distinctly under the belt. "And I suppose," he managed, "there is a consideration involved?"

"You are a very understanding man," said Jeremiah Van Martin. He waved gravely. "His Majesty wishes the pollution removed and I assure you, as a member of the Sydney bar, you are legally responsible for same—er—unless I can persuade His Majesty to change his mind. Say a few cases of gin, some other trifles, and possibly a small commission for myself. Say five or ten pounds . . ." He coughed and waved to seaward. "Otherwise, the pollution not being removed . . ."

We turned and looked and Bulkhead automatically groped for a new cigar, bit the end off and spat. There were a dozen or more snaky, black war canoes bobbing out there in the channel, manned by warriors waving spears and a few ancient guns in noisy defiance. So we could either pay up or try to make a running fight for it; or else get that damned defunct whale to sea again.

"Very neat," Bulkhead admitted, almost admiringly. "Couldn't have thought up a faster one myself. Maybe when I'm back to honest trading again—which I'm apparently not busy with now—I could use you for a supercargo. You'd skin the islands clean in a couple of voyages."

"I'll get the Winchesters out and some dynamite sticks fused and capped," I stated grimly. "To hell with this nonsense! Getting stuck on a shell deal's one thing, but getting stuck with a sick whale that just dies and drifts in—" I choked off speechless but Bulkhead was staring at me with his storm-gray eyes widening and a queer look spreading over his shiny face, while he fumbled with something in his pocket.

"Now, now, Pete. Don't be so hasty," he soothed me. "Can't go around shooting up Kanakas like in the old days. Messy business. And we got ourselves legally tied up to clean off the beaches. Maybe we could get a line on that hunk of dead meat and haul it to sea again."

Jeremiah looked alarmed. "You mean you prefer not to settle with His Majesty? I assure you, sir—"

"If we try and make a tow of that carcass," I snapped, "we'll likely tear our stern off before we get it out of the Cove!"

"Precisely," agreed Jeremiah with haste. "For a few considerations you escape all that danger."

"We'll see," said Bulkhead, scratching his neck and still looking very queer. "I'll go ashore and look the situation over. If we can't manage the tow we'll pay. But I'd like to look first."

Jeremiah didn't like it very much. He'd looked forward to another easy conquest. "If you want to go tramping around in the sun it's your affair," he said irritably. "You know it's nonsense and the sensible thing to do is settle. I'll wait here until you're satisfied, sir." He propped himself against the main cabin skylight, pulled a bottle from his pocket and uncorked it lovingly. "I don't know how long the natives will wait," he warned. "They're a very impatient breed."

"I ought to know," Bulkhead grunted. "Didn't I work this coast myself once? Pete, go get all the sharp knives out of the galley. I'm going exploring."

"You're going crazy," I roared, full and fed up. "You're not going to let this beach rat talk you out of more graft!"

HE DIDN'T even answer and I could hardly believe it when he pushed off with six of our boys, all armed with the cook's knives, and pulled ashore to the dead whale. I didn't even watch what he did. I wasn't interested. I went below and took a few drinks myself, I was that disgusted. When I got on deck again Jeremiah had slid off the skylight and was snoring on the planking. The sun was hovering over the hills, all ready to set.

Then Bulkhead came back and I almost blew an upper yard loose when I saw the condition of the Kanakas he'd taken with him. They were a mess of oil and blood and stink, and every step they took left foul trails on my spotless deck. Bulkhead didn't look so very spotless himself and he was carrying something wrapped in his duck jacket, heavy enough to make him grunt. He flopped it on a hatch and jerked his head at the sleeping Jeremiah.

"Kick the rat awake, Pete," he said. "And toss him overside along with the stuff he wants. But keep the canoe tied close until we're clear of the channel and the war canoes, so there'll be no fighting. Then we'll cut him loose."

I stared at him. "You mean you're going to pay off after all? Look, I've got the guns up and we can run down half the canoes before they know what's hit 'em—"

"Now, now, Pete," he said wearily. "Don't start all that. We don't want any trouble and we can't get that carcass to sea. So we pay off. You carry out orders."

I came nearer to straight mutiny then than ever before, and I didn't treat Jeremiah very gently either. I slammed him over, jerked him to his feet and all but tossed him into his outrigger, along with the stuff he'd demanded. Stranger still, Bulkhead, without any fuss, pressed ten quid in cash into the dazed Jeremiah's hand and warned him he'd be covered by guns until we were safely clear of the channel, when he'd be cut loose with his canoe to take his loot ashore.

"I consider it a great honor to have met you, sir," Jeremiah started to mumble, but Bulkhead gave him the final push that dropped him off the *Willywaw*.

I got that barkentine out of Shark Cove in what must have been record time, but I was so boiling mad as we slid between the scattering canoes, with the now awakened Jeremiah yelling at them not to fight, that I had to keep swearing to stop myself from giving our own wrathful Kanakas orders to open fire. Then I cut Jeremiah and his damned canoe clear and we were at sea. Suddenly Bulkhead appeared, all cleaned up and puffing on a fresh cigar.

"I hope you're satisfied," I said bitterly. "I've

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stood by you through some funny times but I never saw you curl up and cry before. Paying that rat for a sailing clearance. I'll help the boys laugh when I see them again."

"Now, now, Pete," said Bulkhead placatingly. "You ain't got any brains. I didn't want no trouble. That gets the Navy sticking its snout into things again, and digging up more legal stuff. They've already cheated me out of the gold-lip shell we salvaged. Once I knew the deal had squared itself, I just wanted to get away soft, that's all."

"Look," I said bitterly, taking a pencil and figuring on the poop rail, "at a hundred quid a week clear, which same was to start as soon as we got to Port Ducas, you've dropped more than two hundred fooling around Shark Cove—maybe more than that if you figure in all the stores you tossed away. Not to mention making yourself a laughing-stock from Melbourne to Manila. And I thought I was working for Bulkhead Bean! Time was you had a few guts under your fat, but now! Well, maybe it's time for me to find another ship."

"You wouldn't do that, Pete," he said reproachfully. "Here, have a cigar! Besides, Pete, you're the one who gave me the idea in the first place."

"Idea about what?" I wanted to know.

He patted my arm. "Why, something I damned near forgot. You were yelling about me getting stuck on a deal with a sick whale—a very dead whale, too—and that reminded me I'd picked something out of the water when that carcass floated by. Didn't register at the time, Pete. I was too sour over the shell. But see?"

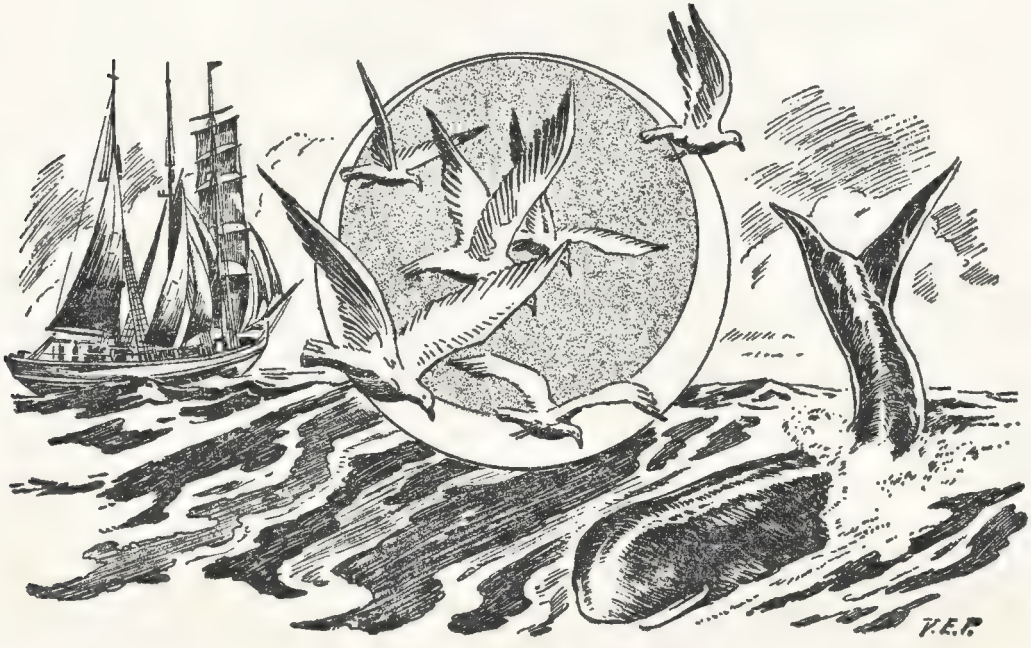
He dug into his pocket and showed me a chunk of what looked like dirty tallow but which made my insides turn over. "Sure, it was a chance, Pete, but when I remembered picking this out the water, sort of absent-minded like, and you talked of a sick whale, why, I just had the boys carve into the guts to see what was in the stomach and gullet. And I struck it!" He scratched his neck and sort of grinned. "Ain't many that can beat Bulkhead Bean, either trading or beachcombing, Pete. What d'you say?"

He pulled me over to look at what he'd brought aboard wrapped in his duck jacket. "I had a hunch there was good pickings in Shark Cove," he stated. "Soon as Jeremiah came aboard. I had a hunch, and I played it right along."

"You played hell!" I said flatly. "Beaten on three cold deals by Towser and Jeremiah and now you claim it was all a hunch. Plain dumb luck, that's all!"

Bulkhead coughed. "Well, Pete," he admitted, "if you got to be fancy, call it that if you like. But it's still nice pickings. Sometime I've got to tell Towser. I ought to laugh."

I felt I ought to laugh, too, but you can't laugh much at ambergris, that phlegm-like stuff sick whales choke up and which chemists use to blend with their choicest perfumes. Ambergris, worth over three quid an ounce. And Bulkhead had collected over fifty pounds of it! No wonder he didn't want to fight.



CHARLIE LYNXEAR AND THE LAW

By KERN L. PERC

"Don't, Charlie," I said, low like. "You'd only hang for it."

ILLUSTRATED BY JOSEPH FARREN

OLD Charlie Lynxear's dead now, so I can tell this.

Folks at Bedrock Crossing where Charlie always traded, and even his old cronies way back in the Tumblin River district that I patroled, said they'd never seen Old Charlie smile.

I did—twice. Once, and that wasn't a pleasant smile, the day we found Joe Anders' body; and again on the day Buck Beasley was hanged.

Bloodthirsty? No; kindest old cuss that ever bucked a blizzard to clear his traps so his catch wouldn't suffer more'n need be. Just crotchety, that's all; and I suppose all those years of liv-

ing alone in that old slab shack on the bank of the Tumblin didn't make him any too genial. But there wasn't a squarer shootin' old codger in my whole district. Never knew him to violate a game law, and he'd raise holy Ned with anyone who did.

That's why I was puzzled at first that day. I had stopped at his shack and found no one home but his old hound, so I followed his snowshoe tracks to a clump of willows by the river.

Old Charlie was hunkered down in the bushes with the barrel of his .30-30 resting in a willow crotch and pointing across the river. I followed his sights to a twelve-point buck that was spreading his forelegs to drink from a blowhole in the ice. A fat doe was on the bank, pawing snow for wintergreens and ground pine.

I crouched behind him, mad and wondering, to think of Old Charlie bagging venison out of season; then the buck let out a snort and high-tailed after his missus up the bank and into the timber. It was then I saw the buck Charlie was really gunning for—Buck Beasley! No mistaking that beefy, black-bearded mug, or the shambling gait of that game warden's nightmare! He slap-slapped down the bank, knelt and undid the babische thongs on his bear-paw webs and then slouched grizzly-fashion out on the ice. He was carrying a stout club and some rusty traps.

The Winchester followed him like the finger of Doom. I saw Charlie's mackinaw tighten between his shoulders as he drew a long breath.

Then, "Don't, Charlie!" I said, low like.

His head snapped up, but he didn't look scared when he turned around. Just full of hate, like the eyes of a carcajou when you catch him at his kill, and I knew it wasn't for me, either.

"He ain't worth it, Charlie," I whispered as I squatted in the bushes beside him. "You'd only hang for it!"

Charlie eased the rifle out of the crotch and lowered the hammer.

"I'd be willin' to!" He sounded like he meant it. His black eyes followed the burly form crossing the river beyond the shack. "Jeanie"—his Adam's apple rose and sank—"died last night. He murdered her!"

"Aw, go on, Charlie," I said. "You know better'n that! I talked to Dr. Parsons at the Crossing this morning. He said it was pneumonia."

"I found her," he went on as though he hadn't heard me, "four days ago, layin' across the sawbuck by the woodpile, damn near froze. She'd been in bed from Buck's last maulin'. Had to crawl out for wood to keep her an' the younguns from freezin'. Buck never left a stick in the shack when he went off on a drunk. I packed her in an' put her to bed alongside the kids. They was scrunched under the covers, whimperin' like a couple of puppies. Buck had beat 'em both—bad."

He yanked a savage bite from his plug of tobacco, tongued the cud against his lean cheek and continued. "I filled the woodbox an' fixed some grub. Had to spoon it for Jeanie. I figgered then she couldn't pull through this one. 'Twas me got Doc Parsons out there. I heard tell yestiddy Buck's braggin' he'll wring my neck for buttin' in." He patted the Winchester and let out a "Humph!" that carried only contempt. Charlie didn't scare easily.

JEANIE was no relative of Charlie's. I guess he never had any. She was just Buck Beasley's harassed half-breed wife, but she'd been kind to crabby old Charlie; and the Beasley twins, cutest little tykes in the Tumblin River district, fairly worshiped the old cuss. And he them. I'm sure he never ate all the peppermint sticks he generally bought at the Crossing; and wizened as he was, he certainly couldn't wear any of the warm little woolens he sometimes traded for, either.

The Beasleys were holed up in a shack across the river and four miles down the trail to the Crossing. It ran a poor second to Charlie's. He always stopped there on his return trips. Had done so yesterday, and that was how he—

"Dammit!" he exploded, "he ain't fit to live, no more'n a pizen rattler!" He glared again up the river. "I figured he'd go traipsin' off today, leavin' his dead for the neighbors to set with. I cal'ate Buck's sure the Law can't touch him, but he fergits Ol' Betsy here." He stroked the brush-scarred gunstock again. "She don't know nothin' about legal fixin's, but she packs a lot o' justice!"

I patted his wiry old arm. "Don't you worry, Charlie. He'll get his, some day. Just give him rope enough and the Law *will* hang him!"

I didn't realize how truly I had spoken till later that day.

"The Law!" Charlie snorted. "It'd jest fine him fer out-o'-season pelts, an' then turn him loose to larrup them younguns to death, same as he did Jeanie!"

"Well," I told him, as we back-tracked to the shack, "he sure got a dose of his own medicine last night, at the Crossing. Got to bulldozing Joe Anders in Bonner's Tavern and Joe pinned his ears back. Didn't pretty him up much."

"Bully for Joe! Pity he didn't splatter Buck's brains on the bar!"

"Charlie," I said, after I'd sampled some of his elderberry wine and got ready to mosey on, "I'd feel a lot better if you'd promise to let the Law take its course. It's bound to trip him sometime."

He started to snort again about the Law, and I threw the clincher, "Just think how those twins would feel, you being hanged for murder!"

That got him. "All right. I won't drill him."

"Nor carve him?" I insisted. Charlie could

pin a red squirrel to a limb twenty feet up with that hand-forged sticker of his.

He shook his head. "I won't butt in. But the Law'd better shake a leg!"

Then he said he'd *mog* along with me, his trap line being partly along my route.

A couple of miles along, we crossed the pulpwood clearing and went down the trail through the birches, following the tracks of the pungs, the wood-shod sleighs used by the Tumblin River loggers. Charlie had some fox bait planted near the skids on the old lumber road.

Just over the brow of the hill above the skids we found Joe Anders. Even with his knitted cap still over his ears, you could tell the back of his head was caved in. The snow beneath it was red with blood.

Charlie eyed the pung tracks and hoof-prints beside the body. "He was restin' his team on the thank-ye-ma'am when it happened," he said.

I reckoned that was a good guess. Joe was lying beside the first of the "thank-you-ma'ams", a series of bumps built in the trail by the loggers to ease their loads down the hill.

"An' there"—Charlie pointed first to one side of the trail and then to the other—"an' there's what did it!"

Snowshoe tracks, bear-paw pattern, crossed the trail. Charlie bent over one and crooked his mitten at me. "I'd know them knotted webs if I saw 'em at the Pole. Buck Beasley always was too shiftless to weave a decent pair!"

They were Buck's tracks, all right. Later we brought his snowshoes out and the patched webs fitted the prints in the trail like a duck's foot in the mud. A BCI man took pictures and blew 'em up big for Buck's trial.

At the bottom of the hill we found the team, neck-yoke jammed against a tree. The nigh horse was down with a broken foreleg. Charlie gave it a quick going over, then slammed a .30-30 slug between the suffering animal's eyes.

The pung was turned over, its maple-shod runners shining in the sun. The boom rope, tied to a bent ash pole to tighten the binding chain, had parted and the pulpwood Joe had been hauling was scattered along the road. I noticed Joe's double-bitted axe still sticking helve-deep in one of the logs.

"Charlie," I said, "you take the other horse over to Joe's place and tell his folks, and I'll high-tail to the Crossing and get the Law out here."

Charlie shifted his cud and bored a brown-rimmed hole in the snow. He slowly untied the two lengths of the busted boom rope and looked them over carefully; looked at Joe's glittering razor sharp axe, then wrenched it loose and laid it flat on the log; looked at the pung; looked at me, and then smiled sort of crookedly. I had a feeling he was already seeing a hangman's knot in that rope!

"O. K.," he said, very softly—for him. Then he looped the rope through the horse's bit and led him away.

BUCK BEASLEY'S trial was short. He tore his hair and yelled he was innocent—that he hadn't even seen Joe Anders that day—but it was a dead-to-rights case against him. His tracks were the only ones Charlie and I had found approaching and leaving the scene of the murder. The timing was perfeot and the motive was easy to prove.

(Continued on page 146)

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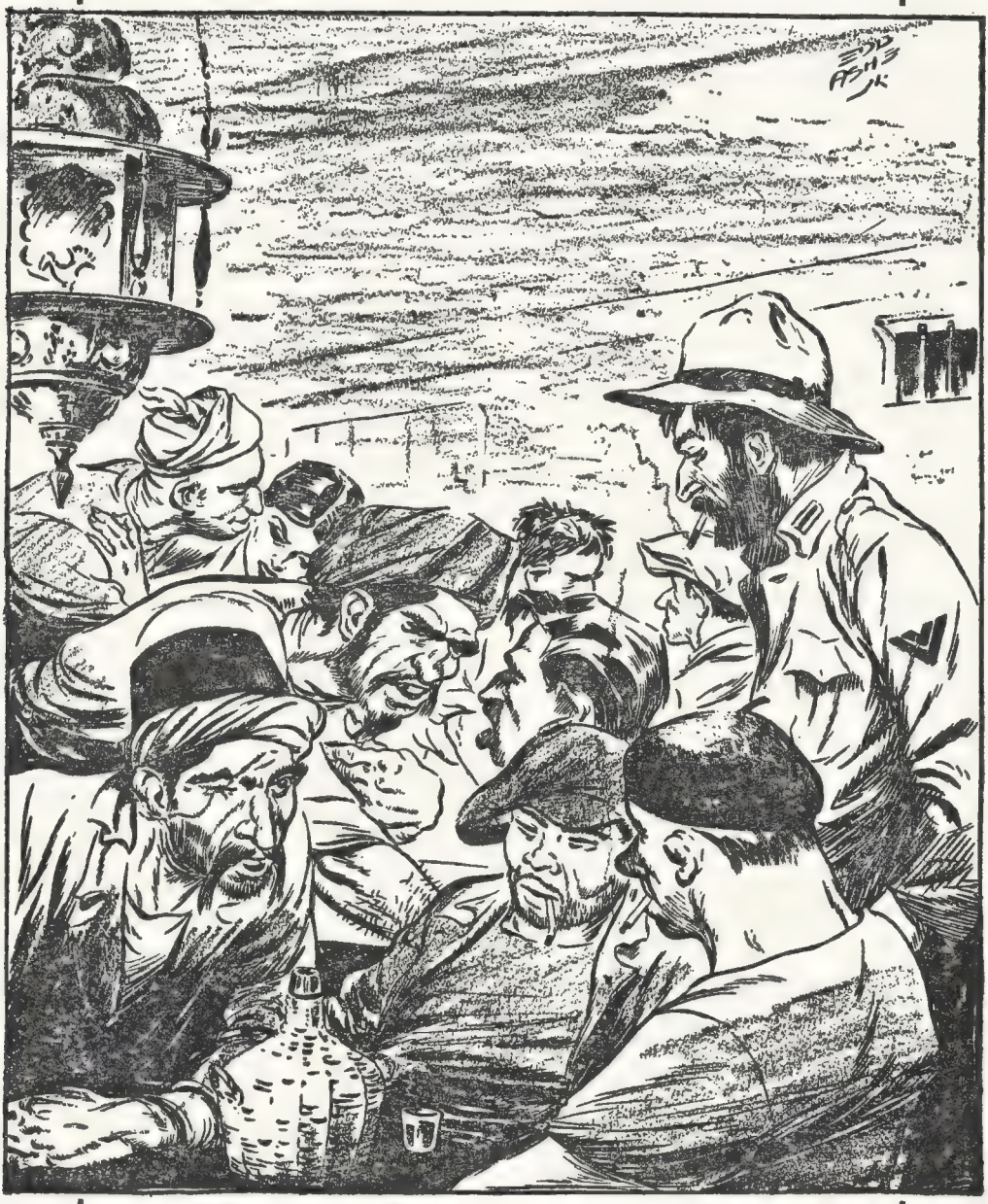

Quain rounded up as sweet a dozen of renegades as you'd want not to meet on a dark night; four of 'em deserters from three different armies.

THE OLD OIL

I DIDN'T want the job; I didn't like any part of it. The thing left me cold, right down to my shoe soles. But the Secretary of—never mind which department—put it on a favor basis.

He sent for me all hush-hush and said, "Mike, you're the only man I know who can perhaps dig deep enough into this. You know that Mid-East country and you know the lingos, and there's no bureau big shot can tell me his Intelligence staff can do a job if they can't talk to the people they're trying to do it on."

I said that was all true enough, but he hadn't told me the set-up yet. So he chased his secretary out and told me and I said, "Nix," flat out. Official Intelligence with the whole Army behind it could fool around all it wanted to but I knew too much about the country to go sticking my nose into any such international finagling all on my lone.

So then he said he hated to pull that kind of stuff on me, but did I remember the Emir of Aden case? And, well, what could I do? I'd skated pretty close to the law's limits in that affair and I'd had to shoot to save my hide and of course the cops had to have their culprit to save face and I was in a spot that was all tagged for the blackout. But the Secretary had believed my end of it—a real guy, with vision and imagination—and he had passed the order down to let me out.

So "O.K.," I said. "I owe you my neck and I'll stick it into this thing for you. What help do I get and from whom?"

And then he really socked it to me. "None," he said. "If it were on this side, I could order police cooperation for you. But there we're up against Army as well as diplomatic jealousies. They have to save face, too. Oh, I could assign you and they'd be polite; but you know yourself how much help you'd get. You'd be the outsider butting into the job of the organized service. And I know very well that you prefer to work by yourself anyhow."

"What about expenses?"

"The sky's the limit." He fixed that shrewd old eye on me. "Until I call you back. And I know you and your cross-word-puzzle swindle sheets. I'll ask no accounting from you, but success."

Well, that sweetened the job a bit, even if all he wanted was a miracle that all officialdom hadn't been able to work yet.

"And one last thing," he told me. "What little information we have has come from a Madame Saida Leiltak. None of our men there has ever seen her, nor knows how to communicate with her. She's apparently terrified of even a suspicion of being seen with the wrong person. I have every confidence in your wit to find her, bribe her, bully her, marry her and get the goods."

So then I laughed and gave his confidence in me a boost. "I know her already," I told him and I watched his eyes pop. And that's all I would tell. "All right," I said. "I get it. I've

ILLUSTRATED BY EDD ASHE

got to play a lone hand. I mustn't tread on the toes of the nice official boys; all you want of me is success; the sky's the expense limit." I fixed my shrewdest eye on him. "How much trouble can you get me out of?"

"Anything short of murder, if I have to. But I've picked you so I won't have to."

"Here's hoping you won't." I was satisfied. "So all I'll need now is some travel priorities and for you to call up the passport division and tell 'em I'll be down to change my name—maybe a couple o' names."

THE sky's the limit. That kind of expense money isn't handed out for any soft job like maybe snooping into a drug racket or alien smuggling. I could size up the layout well enough to know I wouldn't be getting anything for nothing. It boiled down to just one thing and that was a plenty. Oil. I don't have to be telling anybody that this war has drained a big hole in our national oil supply and we'll have to be looking out to get a dip into some of that Mid-East stuff that England and Russia and France and a few others want worse than we do; nor that those Oriental brothers have at last had sense enough to gang up and play all sides against the middle. Irak and Iran and Saudi Arabia, not to mention the little fellows like Bahrein and Kuwait and Trans-Jordan—yes, and Palestine, too—are all talking Pan-Islam politics together so they won't get shoved around the way they used to be. And their big bargaining ace-in-the-hole is Oil!

Who's going to get it, or most of it, is very soft-pedal diplomacy these days and what it's going to mean in the longer run isn't just a few millions, or even billions. It'll be the welfare of nations. And when nations are playing poker it's not for marbles; it's for blood; and one life, or a hundred, are just little red chips in the game.

Never mind what funny business the other fellows are up to; I'll tell you our own end of it. We're playing it straight across the board. We have a couple of sizable concessions in the Persian Gulf and what we'd like is to build a pipe line slam through some of those otherwise worthless deserts to come out somewhere in the Mediterranean and so cut off some ten thousand miles of shipping. We're making no secret about it. But there are some people who are pulling a-whole lot of secret strings to see that we don't get it; and since the pipe line route would have to run through three different governments and a couple of "spheres of influence" you can see that there're plenty of strings to pull.

And that's where I come in. Some very clever undercover gentleman is manipulating a show with his puppets. So far our nice boys have been a little too nice in that den of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves and about the only line they've got on who keeps throwing the monkey wrench is those very guarded letters from this Madame Saida Leiltak whom they don't know where to find. The Secretary told me they figure she's a pro-American Egyptian or some such.

And now I'll tell you my private secret about Madame Saida that gave me my bulge on all the other boys.

There ain't no sich person!

Turn it around and it's just Arabic, *Leiltak saida,* and it means, *May your night be happy,* equivalent to our *pleasant dreams.* Which, if you ask me, looks like some bright body is pulling somebody's leg and doesn't think so much of official Intelligence with its capital *I.*

But I do have this much of a bulge on them. I know it's not Egyptian Arabic, where, when you wish anybody polite good night, they reply *Misa el Kher.* And the Saudis say, *Ma es salama.* And in Iran they make a whole ceremony of it, the three point salaam and, *Tisbah ala kher, May you wake up well;* and the other guy replies, *Wa enta min ahl el kher, and may you, too, be amongst those who are well.* The *leiltak* formula is distinctly Iraqui and so whoever was sending over these little japes would be operating from the Mesopotamian region. Which nicely narrowed my field down to the oldest, trickiest, toughest spot in all M.E.

CHAPTER II

A DEAL IN FIGS

I GOT off the plane at Damas—you know, what the Bible called Damascus. I didn't want to be arriving on the ground looking like a general or special representative muckamuck. And I wasn't Michael McIlvain, private dick. I was Manook Miljian, fig and date importer. In Damas they still make those damascene blades, as they've been doing for two thousand years, and I went to the bazaar back of the Omayyad Mosque that still has stones in its wall from the Church of Theodosius and I bought me a sweetly balanced throwing knife. The dealer told me this was the exact pattern of the blade with which Salome cut off the head of John the Baptist that is still preserved in the mosque; and I told him, "Yeah, and for another dime you'll let your small boy show me the house where Ananias lived in the Street Called Straight and the mark on the old wall where St. Paul was let down in a basket." So then he quit thinking I was a tourist and made me a proper price.

From Damas I rode the bus to Baghdad. It hits a man kind of queer how, in the middle of all this ancient stuff, they run an air-conditioned bus that keeps a temperature of seventy-five. The bus makes an overnight stop at the Rutba oasis that Abraham knew. Now it's an

airport for the British Overseas Airways—so you begin to see another angle of why M.E. is an important stake in the game. And they are right hospitable and let you sleep in a walled rest house with armed night guards so you won't get your throat cut by nomad bandits. Right there I got dressed for Baghdad. My thirty-eight in a shoulder holster—which anybody would find, of course, if they got the drop on you and frisked you; and a little Italian Beretta in a garter clip that might get by if they weren't too wise. But what I really hoped might be a hidden trump was that damascene thrower the way they carry it between the shoulder blades, point up; so that if you're held hands up you have a chance of making a quick reach back and then it can be deadly and sweetly silent.

In Baghdad I waited a day while I settled myself in a hotel and then I went to Hadji Mustapha Bin Ullah who has swiped the slogan from London's Shoolbred's, "Anything from a peanut to an elephant," and owns as much of Irak as military concessions and the oil and fruit people haven't grabbed. Mustapha had already got word of a new date buyer in town and he started out to boost prices by making the supply difficult.

"But brother, ninety percent of the Shatt el Arab crop is already contracted for by your own Dromedary company of America."

Well everybody knows that of course. So I told him I was open to buy in on some of the other local products and I mentioned a few, like Yenidjie tobacco and liquorice root and—poppy seed.

Mustapha gave such a start that he nearly shed his green *hadji* turban. "But, *Effendi*"—that last one immediately rated me a little—"the poppy is a business in which hard men may make or lose much money. There are, moreover, spies who report sales to foreign customs agents. It must be talked over discreetly." So we went into his *dufftar*, a den that stank of *atthar* and with carpets three inches thick on floor, and walls—just about soundproof; I drank a dozen cups of sticky coffee, smoked a fistful of cigarettes of the pure Lattaquieh tobacco that would have cost five dollars a pack at home and we settled nothing because, of course, any real business would require at least a week of maneuvering. Mustapha said, "This is secret between us two alone."

And I said, "*Quahua daiman*," which is very polite and means, *May there always be coffee in your house*, and I went on home to my hotel.

"So now," I said to myself, "this being a dead-

ly secret, I'll be getting swamped with quiet overtures from all the big shots in town, the important ones who'll know what's going on in deals maybe more quiet than poppy seed.

In Baghdad there is a splendid new "European" hotel with air-cooling system and all for the diplomats who come to talk international chicaneries with other diplomats. I couldn't afford to put up at that one—I mean, Manook Miljian, date dealer, couldn't hobnob around there. I had to go to a *zerdabia* on Tigris East Bank where my room temperature was a hundred and ten on a cool day.

I had plumb sweated myself into a doze when something small and round and hot against my forehead woke me and a voice said, "Monsieur will lie very quiet," and at the same time the light switched on.

The hot little round thing was a gun in the hand of a slim guy who looked to me like a Paris Apache. Another ratty little nondescript was at the switch. The Apache shoved a hand under my head and lifted me to sitting up, naked under just a sheet. He yanked away the pillow to see whether maybe I slept with a gun. Then he grinned, quite satisfied. "We shall now converse," he said easily as if he might be a marine landed and the situation well in hand.

"Amateurs," I said to myself. I remained hunched up, hugging my knees under the sheet.

I had plumb sweated myself into a doze when something small and round and hot against my forehead woke me.

THE Apache sat down at the table and hung a cigarette to his under lip. He said, "Monsieur the date dealer is interested, it is understood, not in dates so much as in opium."

The ratty one kept shifting about, chewing his spittle and watching door and windows while he fiddled with a wicked nine-mil. Luger. He was nervous and looked to me as if he'd boosted his courage with *bhang;* a lot more dangerous, I judged him, than the cool one.

I said, "Well, since Hadji Mustapha seems to have a tongue hung in the middle, who's your boss who negotiates his deals through baboons instead of in person?"

The Apache showed even little white teeth and said, "It is not insults that hurt a man so much as perhaps a bullet in his stomach. Monsieur, although very stupid, as his unguarded talk in the bazaar has shown, will perhaps have intelligence enough to understand that this is a business that does not operate with competition. Monsieur will also observe that we are a little committee that does not play games. Monsieur will therefore immediately leave this city."

Now this was shaping up more serious than I had reckoned. I had planted my little opium propaganda to let it be rumored around that I was in an undercover racket and so I'd be crossing other undercover trails. But to be run out of town wasn't in my calculations.

I said, "Look, boys. There's no need to be rough. Your crowd has stuff to sell. I'm here to buy. Why can't we get together?"

I guess a naked man under a bed sheet doesn't look like money business. The gunman who thought he was so clever about how to run a racket looked at me as though I might be cutting in on some little deal in garden truck and snickered the way a city punk does at a farmer. He said, "Monsieur the date peddler does not yet understand that a half million-dollar crop of opium is not so easily snatched by a gang of Uncle Shylock, even though some of it may find its way to certain accredited interests in your country. Since, therefore, you are not accredited to us, you will go quickly away. By tomorrow's plane, no later." He leaned back and had the nerve to blow a smoke ring. It hung in the hot air like a solid funeral wreath.

And there I guess I acted a bit silly. That Uncle Shylock crack always gets under my skin and I don't like the idea that an American dick is going to be scared out of a deal by a couple of punks either.

I said, "Listen, Crapaud. Tell your head ape that one of these days, when I'm not busy, I'll see to it that *he* leaves town; and you go quickly away; in ten seconds, not later."

The ratty one said, *"Balash el kalam."* In Arabic, the fool. "Let's cut the talking. This is a tough one. Better we finish it here." That Luger looked as big as a cannon.

The Apache said, "I think you're right." He shrugged and ground out his cigarette as casually as though he were going to kill a rat. "You go and see that the back stairway is clear. When you whistle I'll give it to this obstinate one and join you. Better we should do it now and go together."

So that called my hand and no more argument. I've seen enough of punks to know when they're not fooling. I cut loose on them from under the sheet. The Luger first. I got him smack over the bridge of his sniveling nose. The other one was still tugging at a gun that tangled in his pocket where nobody but a half-wit would ever hope to make a fast draw. He cursed like a horse neighing and tried a crack at me through the pocket. Missed of course. And then I took him high center between the eyes.

You'd think the hotel had been bombed, the racket that started up. Men, women and eunuchs, all yelling the way an Oriental has to when there's any excitement. About a hundred of them trying to crowd into the room. Till you could hear the louder yelps as an Iraqui policeman's short whip smacked on whatever it could hit and they scuttled and the whole hundred of 'em yelled from outside the door their version of exactly how it had all happened.

The copper slammed the door with his foot behind him. He was very cool and efficient; one of those left-overs trained by the Heinies during their Berlin-to Baghdad railway push.

I told him, "My gun is there on the table."

He just flicked an eye to it; flashed a glance around the room and then went to look over the casualties. He said, "Oho! This one I know. So you are in opium?"

I told him, no siree, I was in dates. He didn't listen; that argument was none of his chore. He said professionally, "Nice clean work. Ve-e-ery clean. You are a cowboy?"

They've learned from the movies that all Americans who know anything about shooting a gun are either cowboys or gangsters. I said no, just dates.

He said, "You were very lucky with two such professional killers."

I said, "They looked to me like amateurs; they were so naive as to think that a man slept these days with a gun under his pillow."

He looked at me hard and shrewd and then he shrugged. "Well, I will have to detain you, of course; but have no fear. Your embassy will see that you get fair treatment." Officially they're being very polite to Americans because, if let alone, they'd much rather do business with us than anybody else; they know that we'll never come throwing our weight around to establish a sphere of influence.

I went along willingly; only I told him, as a first sign of fair treatment, I wanted him to clap a seal over my door so I'd find an extra sock or two when I came back.

He said, "I would almost think you might be a special agent," and I swore, Migod, not I, I was a date importer and my passport was there to say it was so.

DETENTION wasn't too bad. The sergeant—he told me his name was Daoud Oman—had a long buzz-buzz with his chief and they never even locked me up; they just held me in the station while they did their routine investigation stuff.

Hadji Mustapha was there to see me within the hour and he bubbled over with, *"Effendi,* it was not I who spoke or thought a thought. Somebody must have overheard." He fair sweated to get it out. By his father's head, he would never permit even a dream of such a treachery toward our friendship.

I told him, all right, all right; to take it easy, I had never even suspected him of such baseness. But since we were friends, I said, he could now do me a favor; he could find me a bodyguard. The man wouldn't have to be the toughest in Baghdad, I said, but he'd have to be the cleverest and know everything about everybody and be trustworthy.

He surprised me with a little truth. *"Effendi,* there is but one such man in Baghdad. A bastard son of my own from a worthless Lebanon wench and himself the most worthless ne'er-do-well in the city. Whatever evil about the bazaar Shaitan does not know this clown can supply. My sorrow for the sins of my fathers is that he eats my food, doing no manner of work in return. But one recommendation is his; he does not betray his salt. Or at least"—Mustapha looked appalled at the thought—"he has not betrayed me; not yet."

"And Allah knows," I said, "that there can be naught to betray in your household. Send him to me."

The man came warily to the police station but seemingly confident that they had nothing on him. He looked to me like a handsome and quite shameless scamp. He said, "That rogue who thinks he is my father sent me to seek a service with *Effendi.* What kind of service is it and for how much money?" Certainly a wary and right crafty lad, he wasn't going to tie himself up with any job that meant work.

I told him, "A service that has no master. You will come as you will and go where you will. Only you shall retail to me what gossip runs in the bazaars about this one and that one; and the money will be what the information is worth."

"Then," the fellow grinned, "I shall be rich and I am *Effendi's* servant. A hag in the bazaar who reads fortunes told me that such a master would be sent to me."

He hunkered himself down in a corner as if he considered himself very definitely hired.

Sergeant Daoud came in and said, "In the name of God, what brings this wild goat so fearlessly into the lion's very trap?"

"I am *Effendi's* servant," the man said.

"Wallah!" Daoud exclaimed. "What does *Effendi* know of him, Quain, who lets himself be called Bin Ullah?"

I said that on the very best of authority I knew him to be as full of sin as his name—it meant Cain—and that he was also worthless and lazy.

Daoud looked at me very shrewdly, as he had before and said, "We shall then expect to see you both here again. Come, your embassy sends for you."

Cain came right along; he didn't want to lose sight of so good a job. But at the embassy he had to stay out. He told the uniformed Indian *sowar* who barred him frightful things about each one of his ancestors for three generations back, which fortunately the Indian couldn't understand, and he said, "I will be here, master, when you come out, no matter in how many days."

I was left cooling my heels for quite a time while secretaries scurried about with anxious faces and higher-ups hurried along passages to confer on the grave issues of embassies. It seemed to me that the air was full of something more than usually disturbing. I didn't mind waiting because I was really cooling off and for the first time since I got there. Outside the *Shawal* was blowing its balmy hundred and twenty in the streets; which is nothing so special; there're spots in America can do that; only the *Shawal* blows for eight months steady.

But the embassy anteroom was modern American comfort at a standard seventy. I started to do a sum to figure what it cost to keep diplomats happy; but I quit and just wondered why I had to be a dumb dick and stick my neck into international hoodlumism rather than a smart diplomat and know nothing about it.

AT last a very formally polite gentleman had me in to his office and asked me all the standard questions about the shooting and whether I had any idea why and so on. I told him nothing, of course. I said I had flashed some money in the bazaar to show I meant business and that my business was dates; he had my passport there and said that, yes, it seemed to be all right and that the police seemed to be satisfied that I had defended myself against some well known thugs and so the embassy was requesting that I should be turned loose. In fact it seemed that they had already so requested; for Daoud was already gone when I came out.

I had to laugh. Here was half of Baghdad bazaar whispering that I was interested in contraband opium, and the embassy didn't know it yet. Or perhaps they did and were playing not

getting involved, I don't know. Maybe they were smarter than I allowed. On the whole, then, things hadn't turned out so badly. I figured I had pretty effectively established a red herring across my trail, even though the side line was a lot tougher than I had expected and I might be running into some more gratis trouble there. I didn't know just what that clever copper suspected. But that's all in the usual cards of a private dick.

Quain was there all right and I said to him, "Lead me to an *akl dukhan,* that we may eat salt together as man and man."

He took me to a joint that looked to me to be full of half the thieves of Baghdad—wanted to show me off, no doubt; and we solemnly tore a chunk each out of a great pancake of heavy bread and dipped in a salt cellar that had never in its life been washed and we ate. "So shall these ones know," Quain said, "that *Effendi* is under my protection."

That was a good one. Me, Mike McIlvain, under the protection of this scamp. But he proved his worth there. He said slyly, "That excitement at the embassy was about a letter."

It was on the tip of my tongue to ask him how the hell he knew; but he forestalled me. "*Effendi* knows that where there are office servants there are those who observe events for yet other offices."

Well, everybody knew that of course. In the Orient you can't buy menial loyalty for a pay of about four dollars a month; nor anywhere else, for that matter. Anybody playing dumb can see somebody open a letter and get all excited about it and then go peddle his information to some other diplomatic shop for whatever it may be worth.

"A letter," said Quain, "such as they have received before; so went the talk of one who spoke with the post carrier who brought it."

I wasn't a whole lot interested in the embassy's troubles. Till suddenly a hunch hit me like a hot-wire short circuit. A letter! Well, wasn't I here on account of letters that had been getting the diplomatic wind up?

Now hunches, of course, aren't scientific sleuthing. But I'll tell you that there's not a careful dick who doesn't think he ought to give some of 'em a little look-see. I asked Quain what he thought he might be able to find out about this letter, if he had a little money to talk with. He was too smart a one to try and fool me with big promises and grab himself a handout. He said, probably nothing, because most of the servants in all the embassies were always trying to find out salable information about letters and they almost never got a dime's worth. But he would inquire around.

I handed him something more than a dime to go loosen tongues with and I went over to the police station and passed a little roll to Sergeant Daoud. "A gift," I said, "in exchange for the gift of good treatment." I figured, with those opium thugs on my tail, I'd feel a lot better when I'd connect into the oil racket if the cops at least would be neutral.

Quain took me to a joint that looked to me to be full of half the thieves of Baghdad—wanted to show me off, no doubt.

That didn't hurt Daoud's honor any. He said, "*Effendi* has surely been in this land before, buying—dates. May this crop be of the best."

CHAPTER III

SAIDA LEILTAK

I WENT back to my hotel and set about a little precaution of my own against any more night visitors. I had to buy out the Greek who had the room next to mine and I wasted a little of my expense money renting them both. I bought fat inside bolts for both of 'em, too. How I was figuring to lock both from inside was *my* trick; and, as always happens when you take precautions, nothing happens—at least then.

Quain loafed in around noon and his news was that he had been able to learn nothing. "And," I said, "I suppose you spent the whole of the expense money getting people to tell you that much?"

He was indignant. "Nay, master, would such a one as I give good money to those amateurs for nothing? I spent but a small portion of it, and that on a wench."

My money on his wenching! He chuckled along with his sensual details. "The wench is married to a man who is old and fit only to be a sweeper of floors and a cleaner of baskets, wherefore she was naturally grateful for a little close talk with such a one as I—"

I tried to shut him off. "Look, Quain, I am a dealer in fat and ripe dates, not in fat Persian women." But it's easier to shut off a river than a Mid-Easter when he feels the urge of romance.

"As to being a dealer in dates, whatsoever my master says must be undoubtedly true, even though he has shown but little interest in date prices." (Observant scoundrel!) "Continuing, however, about the wench—who, by the way, is not as fat as she might nicely be—out of those baskets that her useless man cleans out"—he fished in his *kaftan* inner pockets—"out of them, master, came these envelopes amongst which may be, so thinks the man who spoke with the postman, the envelope in which came the letter that—"

I grabbed the bunch from him. That was the Oriental of it, talking all around the block when he might have something worth saying, though it looked on the face of it like a pretty blank draw. The envelopes were the usual trash of a waste basket; most of them official stuff from half around the world with printed return addresses or postage-paid franks. No documents, though; no embassy is that foolish. But there was just one local; that is to say, not Irak, but Mid East; a common cheap little envelope with a Lebanon postmark, Beyrouth.

I wish they taught dicks some of that extra-sensory stuff; you know, feeling a paper or a handkerchief or something and shutting your eyes and getting a hunch about it. I shut my eyes and I sure strained; but all I got was that if there was ever anything to those Saida Leiltak letters that gave the officials their jitters, those letters, too, would have been locals, of course. I asked Quain what he might know about Beyrouth.

He said, "Everything, master. It is the end of the world's oldest caravan trail from here and from Nineveh and from Babel of the tower, and of the new road from Mosul of the oil. Upon its walls are inscriptions of the Romans and of the Christians who fought for the Cross, the which are very good to show to the tourists who will soon again be coming. It is the place where the Christian St. George fought with a dragon, and if the tourists are very foolish a good guide, such as I, can show them the very spot. It was also before the war a harbor for navy ships of the French who hope that they may get it back from the English who now hold it. It was besides—"

I shut him up. None of this gossip, old or new, had any bearing on my chore; though "Mosul of the oil" rang a little bell. Just the tiniest tinkle; but, dammit, what else did I have to work on but hunches and a hope that, as I prowled around, I might stumble on some sort of a lead?

I said, "Let's go to Beyrouth."

The trail may be a few thousand years old and all; but nowadays an air-conditioned bus goes there, too; through places as ancient as Acre and Tyre and Sidon—and here was I, snooping around to uncover a racket in gasoline! On the way I thought I might as well tell Quain, whose curiosity itched him like cooties, that I was trying to find somebody who wrote letters and signed herself Madame Saida Leiltak.

He pondered it and said, "It is in my mind that in this land that stinks with secret agents of this and that, it could be an agreed upon signature of such a one."

It was an idea, but I told him, no; because if it were a code the embassy wouldn't be all of a dither about it. And then I shut up; I was talking too much.

In Beyrouth I took the envelope to the postmaster and asked what he might be able to guess about it if there'd be some cumshaw to help him think. And I drew as blank as a rat hole. He told me that that postmark came from so innocent a place as the sub-station at the American University.

That sure looked like a blind lead, but Quain said, "To that place come women as well as men from all the East to seek learning—Arabs, Syrians, Turks, French, English, and Illegitimates. Who knows what learning they may acquire about things other than blessed nights?"

I WISHED I could just walk in and flash a badge and third-degree the whole enrollment of a thousand or so. But I made my excuse to prowl, lying that I had a daughter who could do with some education. Helpful members of the faculty showed me all around everything and drove me nuts talking up their classrooms and their gymnasiums and their deans and their matrons and their useless what not. All as proper as a church and a million miles from anything as intriguing as a modern Mata Hari; and they gave me a beautifully printed year book with photographs and lists of their pupils, all exactly like any back home college; and they hoped they would see me again—with my daughter.

Like hell they would! I let Quain have the year book and boggle his eyes over the girls. He had his lewd comments. "Now this one, this Bernicia Mirialis of the high bosom—"

"What's that?" I yelped. "You can read English and you never let a peep."

"Only the letters, master, not the words; for do not all goods come to the bazaars labeled in the European print?"

Smarter than a lot of our own boys, I had to give him credit. How many of 'em, working in,

say, a date import house, would ever learn to read a letter of the Arabic? And in another minute he showed just how smart. He gave a squeal.

"Master! Look, master! Here is surely the name that you seek."

It couldn't be, of course; but I jumped for the book. And it wasn't. The name he was picking out with his finger wasn't Saida anything at all. But it was like it. It was Sadie. Plain American Sadie Catelle. American for sure because nobody in the world names anybody Sadie.

I flung the book away. But Quain quoted the proverb, *"What Allah the Inscrutable gives is worthy of scrutiny."* And then my wits began to work again. There just could be something in this. Why not? American? It could be possible that a loyal citizen might hear a rumor and pass it along. Anonymously? A girl in a college wouldn't want to get dragged into anything. And then the old hunch blazed. Reversal, by golly! The commonest little subterfuge of the inexperienced ones. Catelle—Leiltak! Sadie—Saida! A long shot, but by God, it just could be. Yes, I'd have to scrutinize this Sadie.

Have you ever tried, a plumb stranger, to crash in on a girl in a college? Deans and matrons and hairy faculty prowling as if they were guarding the mint. A wolf could easier get into a hen roost and the farmer with a sawed-off shotgun. That's the hell of working unofficial. That's where a flatfoot gets the break. With a badge he can walk up to any big shot and get cooperation. I never even got a look at Sadie. All I could find out was that her folks were missionaries. *Missionaries,* so help me! And me looking for a spy!

Baalbek's the place where somebody built a lot of fancy columns in the desert before history began.

But I did get one little break. They were running their mission at Baalbek up the road a ways. That's the place where somebody built a lot of fancy columns in the desert before history began and architects and tourists go there to say, *Ah* and *Oh.* So there's a settlement; but why missionaries would want to go there is more than I know about religion.

Well, it was around that country that they coined the one about Mohammed going to the mountain. So if I couldn't get to Sadie, maybe I could figure out how to bring Sadie to me. All quite crazy, of course; but I'd already put in so much time on this blind lead that I plumb had to see it to its end, or else be fretting for weeks, wondering whether I'd missed something. I quoted to myself the absolute rule that a careful copper passes up nothing and I went on to Baalbek to hob-nob with missionaries.

Pa and Ma Catelle were the swellest people. They were ready to fall on my neck just because I was American without ever asking what kind, bad or good. They took it that everybody was good intrinsically, only some had been misled. I wished I could have told them, "Yeah? Y'ought to meet some of the goons I get to know in my job." But I had to play I was one of the good ones, and I'm telling you it was good and difficult. I had my yarn all ready. I made out that I was one of those earnest guys who thought that education was important and I'd made a little money and I thought that a girl, if she had any talent, ought to be helped along with a scholarship.

Well, ask any parents whether they think

their prodigy has talent. Sure, their Sadie was the brightest, sweetest, well-raisedest—and so on for half an hour; and they could have her get a couple of days off from school and come right up and prove it.

I O.K.'d it. I didn't mind putting that one over on those good people because I was willing enough to spend a little of the Secretary's expense money on some learning—if I could learn anything out of it. I'd been pretty easy on him so far.

SO Sadie came and, by golly, they hadn't exaggerated. Sadie was IT! Red-blonde and pink and white and just nineteen and as erudite as all hell and—this one lifted my ebbing morale a tall notch or two—Sadie was one frightened girl about something!

I remembered what the Secretary had said. "Buy her, bribe her, bully her." Well, I couldn't do any of those with this Sadie. Scared she was, but she held her chin up. "Marry her," the Sec had said, too; and by, jimminy, I could have, even if I'd have to settle down and inherit poppa's business.

We sat around the parlor, the whole troupe of us, well into the night and they pulled the bung plumb out of the education barrel. Migod, it was frightful, what a lot of useless things they all knew and a scholarship, they were piously sure, would let the girl know a lot more. That American Beyrouth college, I figured, must be doing a real job of selling its goods. It wasn't till close to bed-time again that I was able to get Sadie out to an old chunk of stone seat that had winged buffaloes carved into it. I couldn't waste any more time and I gambled on putting it up to her straight; if my bet was way off the track, why she wouldn't know what I was driving at and she'd just correct my Arabic grammar. I said to her, "You know so much about everything. So what do you know about Saida Leiltak?"

And, my God, I'd hit it! I tell you, if I'd known any I could have said a prayer for following the rule that says a sleuth can't afford to pass up any bets.

This Sadie girl gave just one gasp and fell up against me, all limp. I wished it could have been under different circumstances. She shuddered out of it and was finally able to whisper, "Who are you?"

I said, "I'm just a guy who can endow a little scholarship—if you can tell me about those letters."

So, well, to cut a lot of talk short, she said, yes, she had written them, three of them and now this fourth one. But there the trail petered right out again. She knew pretty near everything about all those useless things, but about this she knew pretty near nothing. Only that somebody very hush-hush was spending a lot of money to see that America wouldn't get anywhere with any oil pipes and so she had tipped off the embassy.

Well, that wasn't helping me any farther; the Sec had told me as much. Sadie got her bits of news from a room-mate in the college, a Miriam Nahas who was related to some Iraqui big wig and she listened to more than she ought to hear at home; but it was all so hush that she never heard very much.

So, all right, I said, we'd have to see what we could do about having a talk with this Miriam. And there I got a jolt. This was what was scaring Sadie. "Miriam," she said, "has suddenly gone away! Disappeared! The dean of women doesn't know why or where. That's why I wrote that last letter."

It didn't take any particular brightness to mull that one over. This Miriam, as anybody in my job could guess, had a naughty little habit of talking too much and she'd been snatched! Either by her own folks or by somebody else; most likely, the way I doped it, by somebody else; because her own folks, if they'd wanted her out, could easily enough just send for her. That didn't look so good to me.

I didn't want to frighten Sadie with any more of this racket. I told her, "Look, you're a smart girl and you've got plenty of courage. You've kept this to yourself so far; so just lay low for a bit yet and perhaps it'll be a lot of help to our poor old Uncle. And for being a good girl you'll get your scholarship all right. Come, we'd better be going in. Be bright and tell your folks the good news."

She said, "Thank God somebody like you has come to take this off my shoulders." If she'd been anybody else I could have kissed her.

CHAPTER IV

RAWHIDE

I WENT on back to Baghdad. I didn't want to lay any trail of my own, asking around the college who was Papa Nahas. I told Quain that his job was to dig all the dirt about him out of the bazaar scandal peddlers.

He said, "All of Mid East is full of Nahases and relatives of Nahases and they all have dozens of daughters and some of them even know about them."

I said, "Well, dig. And quick news. Tomorrow! Will be worth some pay."

He didn't come in tomorrow. But I knew he'd been busy, because his inquiries brought results. That night I had visitors.

I wasn't exactly expecting them yet, but I was ready. I heard them scrabbling about my room door. They had keys, of couse; but my fat bolt held them a while. They were smart, though I could hear a soft drilling for a wire through the bolt to ease the bolt over. I could afford myself a little laugh. I had that other trick up my sleeve; the one about the next door empty room. Simple enough, but it has worked before on crooks a bit more experienced than these. I just had a rope stretched across the outside wall to the next window. I chinned along it and swung a leg over the sill. From that door I could hear them whispering. I didn't know how many, but I had the advantage of surprise on them. I eased open the door and there they were, three dim shadows fussing over my other entrance. I was at their backs before they knew a thing.

I said, "All right, chumps. Up. And keep 'em high."

They eeked their shock and one of them started to yell the way they do when they let go. I smashed him a stiff left under his chin

that gagged his yelp in his throat—it's only in the movies that you pistol-whip a man when you're needing your gun to cover some others—and I frisked them and prodded them into my spare. I could see they were no better than the local imitation of gorillas. No Apaches this time. Natives gone modern, they had quit the flowing robes of the East and taken to pants, though they still wore turbans of sorts. One of them was some kind of a half-breed. They had been studying the movies, too, and they thought they knew how to be tough. This was altogether another outfit from my first callers. Perhaps—I tingled to the hope—*my* outfit, the crowd I wanted to meet.

I told them, "Now then, offal. Who's your boss?" I was sure the boss man of a racket like this wouldn't be so silly as to get into a common mayhem job.

They put on the old Oriental mask; their faces went dull and sullen. Whatever they knew, they were too scared to say. The boss was apparently a hard man on squealers. They just retreated into the silence of the East that has baffled the white man in all his dealings.

I shrugged as if I didn't give a hoot. I said, "All right then; you prefer to wait for Oriental methods of loosening your tongues."

One of them, the one I had smacked in the neck, was mad enough to put on his tough act. He spat on the floor and said, "What does an American agent of Christian dogs know about our methods?"

So they knew who I was. I tingled again; certainly this was my crowd. I was getting somewhere at last. I said, "Very well. *Allah yi tik.* May God then have compassion on you."

The half-caste didn't have the nerve of the other two; he chittered, "Have a care, Hafiz. This one, as we have heard, is a very brother of devils."

I grinned at him, working up the old scare psychology. "And, little jackal of a big crook, I know many ways of making hell for those who sulk."

And now I'll tell you how dumb a guy can be who thinks he has seen all the tricks; a guy like me when he holds the cards and the other fellow has a fifth ace.

Hafiz let out a bellow and reached for his turban. And damned if he didn't have a knife in it! A short, crooked sheep-gutter like the nomads use. I was so taken off guard that he dived for me and came within half an inch of doing me up like a sheep before I could unlimber and blast him. No fancy shooting this time; he was right on top of me and I fired wherever the gun touched. He crumpled and I was ready to cut down on the other two, but they cringed back into a corner and then I had the sense at last to slap their ears till their teeth rattled and their head gear spilled. But it was only their Hafiz who had been the bright one.

I just had a rope stretched across the outside wall to the next window.

By golly, I thought, these oil people weren't playing any penny-ante. Just a whisper around the bazaars that an American wanted in and they were ready to have him murdered out of the way.

It was a repetition of the last time. Daoud came. He grunted, "Brother, you are making a name for yourself. Never have we had one in our city who has gotten himself so disliked by our underworld in so short a time. This time we must know why."

I told him, "That is what I'd like to find out. To me these men wouldn't talk. You may know how to make them sing."

He said grimly, "They will. Come along and let us get through the formalities."

That was where my little hand-out paid off. They didn't bother the embassy with me this time; they had a sensible law that unauthorized persons prowling hotel passages with weapons was evidence enough to throw them into the calabozo. Daoud said, "These two will duly tell us everything that they ever knew or thought;

if for no other reason than that we ourselves have a curiosity to know just what kind of dates you are interested in."

I said, "It might be worth something to me if, when you know, you do not broadcast it from the house tops."

Daoud grinned and said, "In that case, since we will have an interest that you live, I would advise that you move from that hotel where so many *bashi-bazouks* are able to enter without hindrance."

I DID move; but not the way I'd have liked to. Quain showed up with frightening news. He said, "Of the legion of Nahases I have word that one who has a daughter in that school has a villa near the Ginena Iddini and that a relative of his who knows the place may be found nightly at a certain house of henna-handed ones on the West Bank of Tigris."

That meant a brothel. I said, "Fine. Let's go to the West Bank and meet this Lothario."

"Unless," Quain said, as if we might be planning another pleasure jaunt, "Master would prefer to go again to Beyrouth."

"Beyrouth? What for? That place is sucked dry of news."

"There was a word also about that *sher-shuckr girl.*"

I could feel evil oozing right through my skin. *Sher-shuckr* means milk and honey and it's from a particularly fine weave that they make that we get our seer-sucker. But I knew that he could mean nobody but Sadie. I must have gawped at him with open mouth; for he answered it.

"The word was but a whisper—that she is neither in the school nor in her home."

That shook me. I could feel the little hairs rising all up my spine. There was just one guess and that was, "Snatched!" Because somebody knew she was this Nahas girl's room-mate and she might—she just might have heard— But no, I had to amend that and know it was worse than just might. They had made the Nahas girl talk and so they knew that Sadie was a danger.

I confirmed by telegram, and the thing was damnably true. The folks knew nothing. Sadie had just disappeared. They were frantic; they bleated and they wrung their hands; they had reported to the police and they were praying.

I tell you, I sweated. That kid in the hands of—of nobody knew whom. But I knew this much; while these Orientals had modernized to the extent of sending gunmen around to do their business, they weren't so different under their skins from what their fathers had been; and it was in those parts that they invented the idea of sending a finger joint a day till they got what they wanted. They did it when they captured crusaders and they did it in Forty-one when they captured a British G-2.

And so her folks reported to the Lebanon police and sat and prayed! It was like reporting something to, say, the police of Costa Rica with other countries' border lines less than a dozen miles in any direction. I knew it was no use kiting off to Beyrouth on the off chance of picking up a clue. The local cops could do that as well as I could. No, my one bet was to take it from the other end—catch this Nahas and twist some names and hangouts from him. And fast, because this crowd, now that they had gotten a breath of suspicion, weren't letting any dust settle.

It rocked me back. Here was I, fumbling in the dark to find out just a name of somebody who was mucking up an oil deal, and they already had tabs on me and everybody else who ever talked about it and were making damn sure none of them would talk any more.

We jumped the old caravan ferry to the West Bank and Quain took me to this joint to hang around till the Nahas man's second cousin's nephew or whatever he was should show up. We had the houris bug-eyed, wondering why such early customers wouldn't drink up their doped arrak and make a selection. They kept sending out and bringing in new ones who had fancier wiggles to their hooch dance. Bulgy slobs with their hennaed hands and kohl-solid eyes as big as cows; migod, they looked to me like ghouls gyrating in the thick incense smoke.

But he came in at last, a sorry enough specimen who looked as if he lived there. We went to a curtained booth and threw out its wench and called for a bottle—not arrak, Greek masticha, which is pretty fierce in its own right. This fellow lapped it as if it were mere whiskey; and after he'd seen some of my money he dissolved enough to open up about the Nahas villa by the Ginena Iddini.

He described the place and, by golly, I knew the house. I did a job there back in Forty-one when the Iraquis were still listening to Heinie propaganda and thought they'd get help to resist the British advance; and a sweet pretty scorpion nest it had been then. It could have been the Ginena itself; a regular movie nabob's love nest with palms and fountains and a high wall and about twenty rooms shut off for a harem and— Oh, I ought to tell you, of course. Ginena Iddini is the Garden of Eden; it was somewhere along those groves and plantations on the Tigris a few miles north of Baghdad that all our troubles started. There are as many genuine sites as there are tourist guides in Baghdad. Yank fliers going through hatched 'em out like buzzards; and if momma's Sunday school pupil was sucker enough, by gum, for another dollar they'd show him the very apple tree that remained young and fruitful because it was holy. The old snake hole would be another two bits.

I took the masticha away from our dope and poured sticky coffee into him till he could bab-

ble lucid enough to be able to take and introduce us to this Mr. Nahas. Back on the East Bank I damn near had to buy a car to have the use of it for the night. A German Mercedes it was with that funny drive, but it could go.

We made the Eden district in three hours, and then the road gave out. The dust piled like snow drifts in that *Shawal* wind, hub deep. We'd have to walk the rest, which wasn't too much of a chore if we didn't melt before we got there. The weedy dope melted anyhow. Damned if he hadn't managed to bring along the rest of the bottle and guzzle it in the back seat. I was mad enough to kick myself. Not that I needed him, only a halfway alert dick ought to watch out for things like that; but what with being in a crazy hurry and scared pale about what might be happening to the Sadie girl I had passed it up —passed up a whole lot of precautions.

We bedded the relative down under a fig tree and plowed ahead through the dust. I knew the way and it wasn't far now. The house was all lit up as bright and honest as though this Nahas were having himself a hot party—to celebrate, I supposed. It suddenly hit me that a long dead ancestor of his was having himself a hot party when something happened to cool it off. Nebuchadnezzar, he was; but the way they spelled it here was Nabu-Chod-Nahasr. So I was mad enough to bust in and show them some handwriting on the wall.

THERE was a big iron gate with a gate keeper. I told him, "Visitors, and don't fool away time chattering about it." He opened up without any fuss at all, as though they were expecting more visitors. There was a shell driveway curving through a rose arbor—free of that blasted dust at last. We crunched to the door and that opened up, too; a servant salaamed and bowed us to the magnificent olive-wood door that I remembered. I didn't know who he thought we were—not for as long as ten whole seconds. He opened the door and slammed us in. And then I knew.

There were about fifteen dingy guys in the room and they weren't having a party—not yet. They were waiting for the honored guest. And that was me! All of the fifteen had guns of one sort or another. I swallowed one gasp and I knew the whole story; knew it in one word. Sold!

I knew it before Quain said quickly, "Abu fell drunk; but I have brought him."

Sold by the Serpent in the Garden!

The fifteen chuckled at me as gladly as though I'd just said, "Open sesame" and walked into their cave. And then I had to suck in another gasp. A ghost stepped out from the mob and grinned like a skull right in my face. My Apache! The punk I'd shot slam between his eyes in my hotel room. But his grin split his face and he said like a mind reader, "Do not be afraid. I am but his brother. Do not be afraid—yet."

And then I saw it wasn't a ghost. This one had the mark of the date on his cheek. It comes from a great boil that you can get in that climate and it leaves a scar the size and shape of a date. I was getting my wits back and I knew they were all waiting for me to cringe. I said, "How often do I have to kill you?"

Pure brag, of course. I wasn't fool enough to try any movie gun play in that set up, but it helped to keep a stiff upper lip.

Brother Apache grinned with more teeth than even a skull ought to have. He said, "Of killing we shall talk later. But first Monsieur the date dealer will speak of other things. Surely he will speak of other things."

The mob came and frisked me; all of 'em at once. They gibbered over my shoulder holster and they—natives, this crowd—knew about my Damas knife between the shoulders and they fair whooped. But hope as thin as its blade crept in through the black mess; they still didn't suspect my garter clip.

Brother Apache seemed to rate boss. He told his crew, "This one is a hard man. We shall first soften him a little and he will then tell us everything that his stupid embassy knows about

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oil. The rawhide cord is always a good softener as it grows harder."

They all laughed. I had no tough comeback. I knew about the cord method. About twenty paws took hold of me; the rest would have, too, only they were holding guns wherever they could reach in.

They roped me into a chair and they giggled as shrilly and delightedly as school-girls while some of them fetched a bucket of water and snaked a slimy length of rawhide from it. They'd been all ready for me, the bastards; and I knew I'd be a good fifty percent correct when I called them that.

They just laughed, enjoying the fun. A goat-faced goon wagged a beard and told me what I'd already guessed. "Our good Abu gets very drunk, but he is always wise enough to convey his information first. He telephoned us the very same hour that this Quain first spoke to him."

For just a second I wondered that he hadn't included Quain in with their gang; but what use speculating? They could afford to laugh all right. If their rope trick worked I'd be sweated down meek before long.

The trick was to wind the rawhide round and round my forehead and then all they had to do was just let it dry. I saw a poor devil one time on whom that one had been worked, and as it dried it contracted hard and bulged his eyes out of his face. Around the belly is another angle of it and it'll squeeze the guts right into a guy's mouth and they can laugh and ask him how he tastes.

So they wound me and stood around and giggled a spell.

That's the essential difference about Orientals. I've seen American thugs put over some pretty tough stuff; but they do it with hard eyes and tight lips as a job of work for whatever its reason. Orientals are able to like doing it and the way they chuckle leaves you cold right down to your toes.

Brother Apache said, "In this dryness of the *Shawal* it will take about three hours before he will be screaming for the privilege of being allowed to tell us everything that he knows. After which"—he put stress on the, *after*—"I will speak to him about my brother." They all gurgled like buzzards over something dead. He smirked appreciation of their compliment. "Till then, brothers, we must amuse ourselves by going to the *kandlas khana* and finding food."

Hope burned through me again, but he wasn't that silly. He picked out one whom he called Hazrut and two other big baboons and told them to sit watch on me. "—and if he commences to babble about his embassy before we come back, call us."

My embassy! The little flare of hope chilled off. My God, if they figured to sweat the nothing that I knew about the embassy out of me I'd be sorry leavings.

CHAPTER V

KNIFE AND GUN

THEY trouped out and my three baboons went to a divan and squatted on it the way apes do with their feet tucked under them. There was a brazier of charcoal alongside and one of them blew it to a glow. My stomach came up into my throat at the thought of what the boys might be planning; but the fellow just put a coal to the bowl of a hubble-bubble pipe as big as a flower pot and they began passing the tube.

The smoke eddied thick and low and in about ten minutes I got it—rose water, of course. But—and this was sheer Providence looking down on me for something good I must have done some time—there was hashish in the tobacco mix!

Nothing for me to chuckle about yet. It wouldn't put them out, but they'd be comfortably thicker in their wits than they were by their normal rating. So hope once more crawled out of my boots.

This room that we were in, a sort of reception hall, was a barn as big and lavish as those nabobs like it. I was roped to a heavy teak-and-ivory chair on a little platform at one end, being the show piece of the evening, like a nabob, when he receives the underlings. The baboons hunkered on their divan away in a corner. The three of 'em together looked like, "Think of evil. Speak of evil. Plan evil," or whatever the gag is. I couldn't think that clearly. I had other things to work on.

Three hours I had. The *kandlas khana*, the kitchens, I knew were out-buildings like all those places have because of the greasy spicy things they cook. So then, if I could only get loose, the rest of the gang wouldn't be any too close to me.

Yes, I could definitely have more than just a crazy hope. The room wasn't any too light, either. When I had last known it there had been a huge chandelier all hung with hideous glass prisms like a theater; but it looked as though some gay lad during later exciting times had been shooting at it. A lot of the bulbs were out and every now and then their Foerster plant —that's a German Delco thing—that I could hear spluttering outside would gulp out and then stagger to life again.

Though I wasn't looking for any miracle of sudden darkness, I was remembering back to the much more practical self-help they had taught me in long ago police school about roping a man to a chair.

This roping business, you must know, isn't quite as simple as a lot of dim-wit crooks think. It isn't just wrapping a mile of sash cord around the victim and his chair; it takes some know-

I could just about twist up my wrist and pull the trigger. I stopped one of them—Hazrut, I think.

how. Just as there's a lot of know-how about letting yourself be roped. So, while I wasn't any escape artist, I knew the rules—swelling yourself up and wriggling wrists under turns and all that. I set up a groaning and a heaving as if the rawhide was beginning to do its stuff—and it was, too, no mistake. In that dry heat the damned stuff was tightening up fast. I'd have to be loose quick or pretty soon I wouldn't be able to do any useful thinking.

There must have been more than a mile of the cord. I kept up my show of moaning and writhing. The baboons appreciated the act and called advice to me over their smoke. "Pull harder, brother. Perchance, like Samson of Gazeh, the ropes will break." And, "Twist with your muscles, not with your face."

The more I squirmed the wiser grew their cracks. Till presently they began to dope off a bit and only now and then one would think of a bright gag and they'd all chitter.

At the end of about the sweatin'est hour of my life I had my wrists clear—and high time, too. That thong was squeezing in like a concrete casting and every move I made I could feel my blood clunk, clunk, against it.

And then I was able to reach around a bit with my right arm from the elbow down. Now you might think that was that; and it would be—if you've been left alone to wait till the killer comes home. But there was a lot of wrapping to unwind yet; and with three of 'em sitting watching that was too much movement to get away with.

One of them looked bleary-eyed through the smoke and jabbed the next one with his elbow to see if he saw the same thing. So my time was up. The zero second was right now! And I still wrapped like a cocoon!

The three of them unlimbered themselves from their divan and came lurching toward me, loose-kneed and arms hanging low like Tarzan's ape men, peering to see what went on. I was hunched over, clawing desperately at my pants leg. I could just about reach it, but the damned rope was twisted all around it and the chair. They were close enough now to see that I wasn't as tight as I had been and they stumbled into a run. I was able to get a fist hold and wrench a piece out of my pants leg and get at the gun there.

I could just about twist up my wrist and pull

the trigger. I stopped one of them—Hazrut, I think. He swung away clutching at his belly. And then I plumb missed two more shots!

Shooting from ankle height with an arm stiff from the elbow down isn't like shooting from a fast belt draw. And then the other two were right on me.

IT was the Oriental in them that gave me my thin chance. What I mean, when a man is born to the knife, just putting on modern pants doesn't turn his mind naturally to a gun. So it was with their knives they came at me.

I could sort of stand up, chair and all, and the best I could do was heave the whole parcel of me at them. My own weight is about two hundred and I suppose the chair was another fifty. They had to go down; chair on top and me in it with my legs kicking like a turtle on its back, expecting every second a blade to come licking through somewhere. One did, high over my belly, and all I could do was kick and wait to be stuck. But I got a piece of luck where I needed it most. One stab just cut a coil of rope. And then it was probing around higher up for my throat, sawing and stabbing for whatever the fellow could feel. His greasy sleeve was over my mouth, so the knife kept missing the other side of my neck by just inches. I got his wrist between my teeth and heard him yell, and I'll tell you no bull pup ever hung on harder than I did just then.

The fellow fair whimpered and he heaved up so that chair and all rolled clear and damn near dislocated my jaw. But I hung on, and this time I was on my knees and, miracle, the other arm was free! My gun was lost, of course, but I was able to shove a short chop to the monkey's jaw. No real smack on the button, but I could keep poking at him while he *ughed* to each one and at last, his head on the floor with no give to it, he groaned off for a long count. And then, miracle again, I saw that the other fellow hadn't been in the fight at all. His wind had been knocked from him when we all went down under the chair and he just lay gasping.

I managed to hoist myself to my feet, chair and all, and jump both knees on his belly, and then my hand just about fell on a knife and in another short count I was loose. Loose, by God!

The next thing I did was give myself a sweet slash across my forehead, shoving the knife under that cursed rawhide and sawing it clear. My whole head swelled up with the blood rushing in and I blacked plumb out!

I came out of it dizzy with lights sparking in my eyes. I couldn't see my gun anywhere and I wasn't waiting to hunt. I didn't know how long all this had taken—I'd have said hours. Those *kandlas* raiders would be along any minute and I wasn't having any ambition to do a Wild Bill Hickok and carve up a dozen McCandlesses in a knife fight. But I whooped.

And I'll tell you why. Why I'd been able to hope and stay with it. As I said, I knew that house and I knew that back of my little stage where I was to be the show of the evening there was a door behind a hanging tapestry. No secret passage stuff, just a door for the nabob to make his entrance when the guests were assembled and he got his cue. It opened into a little dressing-room and from there through some more rooms to a side entrance.

I was out and sprinting through the Garden of Eden all in one breath. I made the wall and I tell you an angel with a fiery sword wouldn't have stopped me.

In about two more long breaths I made the car; and there a figure rose up out of the night. I was just saying to myself, "Well, brother Abu won't be a loss to anybody." But it was Quain's voice that came.

"*El hamdu l'Illah illi gat salima.* The praise to Allah for what has turned out well."

It stopped me like hydraulic brakes. Gasping. And then I jumped and had him by the throat. Like a fool, he could have knifed me.

But he choked out, "Abu is as well dead as any other dog and here, master, is his gun."

I slung him into the car and got going. With a good stretch of road behind me I said, "Now rat, let me hear your lies."

I'll give him credit. He didn't whine. He was, instead, indignant. He had the gall to bawl me out. "It is a discredit to master," he said, "to think ill of me after we have eaten the salt."

"Yeah? And what about your fifteen pals back there?" I put it to him. "I wasn't dizzy with any thong around my head when I heard you deliver me."

But he had his good reasons. "Nay, master; being trapped as we were, what could a quick-thinking man do but hope that a pretense of being in that dog Abu's pay might convince them?"

I mulled it over for another ten miles or so and I was so intent on figuring all the angles, I didn't see a hyena in the head lights and I crashed it and damn near turned the car over. It stank like a skunk and I began to see that this clever Quain was just as smart as I had always allowed; he was here with me, after all, instead of with them. I said, "O.K., then, *Ma takhiznish*, do not blame me, for, by Shaitan, the evidence was against you."

He said, "*El afu*, the forgiveness." As though it had all been my fault. And we were friends.

WE made Baghdad with a new moon coming up behind its minarets looking like a holy city. I said to Quain, "And now what hotel do you know where gunmen can't come crawling the passages any time they like?"

He said, "There are none such in Baghdad but the English guarded hotel of the Air Lines. And what need now for master to go to native serais? Within the day all Baghdad will know that he is not a dealer in dates."

So O.K., I got a respectable room at last and the next day Daoud found me. He said, "I know nothing, but from the reports that came in about disturbance and death I deduce that you have been spending the night in the neighborhood of the Ginena Iddini."

I told him the proverb, *"The cat deduces always that it must be mice that have nibbled the grain sack, yet sometimes it has been rats.* What of those two assassins whom you locked up?"

He said, "They, alas, went to the hospital and they knew only that one, Hazrut, had hired them to remove you because you were not a dealer in dates."

I told him, "I have heard a rumor that Hazrut is dead of a stomach ache. And now it will be worth twice as much money to me as this which I now ask you to receive on behalf of the police hospital to find one, Nahas, who has a daughter in Beyrouth."

He gave me the usual line—that the hospital would indeed be grateful for so handsome a donation, but in a free land where people refused to let themselves be registered or fingerprinted there would be no record of this particular Nahas unless he happened to be a crook, but they would inquire around. In the meanwhile, for the hospital's sake, I had better go very warily and take care of myself.

I didn't find Nahas. He found me. He came right to the hotel and burst in on me in a tidal wave. He cried a quart and he embraced my knees. He was a prosperous-looking guy with a paunch and a curled beard exactly like those things they used to carve on the old Assyrian rocks.

He said: *"Effendi! Sheikh! Shereef!"* He promoted me with each breath. *"Malik!"*—that made me a king—"Only you can do it. Find me but my daughter and I—I pay my fortune to make amends—I confess—I do all that you demand as your slave."

"Oho!" I said. "So then I was right. You didn't take her out of school. They snatched her. Because *you* knew something and she heard. She keyholed in on a conference of what all your crowd could do to stymie Uncle Sam. So all right, what do you know? Who's the boss?"

He wilted back on that one; but for once in this game I was holding some cards at last. I told him, "All right, go to the police and tell 'em your girl's been hooked."

He fair yammered at me. He told me what I knew and the rest I could guess—that the snatch had been in another government and he had no evidence to hand to the police here, who wouldn't touch anything involving so big a shot without a lot more to go on. So he came to me because I was doing quite a job of bucking the gang and I had 'em sitting close and holding their tails high off the ground.

And that brought it right back to who was the gang and its boss. He sweated; but I told him, all right, to go peddle his woes to any local dick who'd touch 'em. So then he spilled it. The liaison man hired by the opposition was plenty big enough to throw a heavy monkey wrench. He moaned and he shivered, but he had to name names. And I whistled.

The boss was— Well, I suppose in an international deal like this I have to be discreet, too. But I can tell you he was related to most of the kings and emirs of all the Mid East. Brother-in-law to one and cousin to another and grandson to somebody else. Of course that's why they picked him; and he was the bad sheep of a lot of dusky royalty that had to play a most wily game for their own preservation and it was the old story: He always needed money and the oily interests just up and bought him to "use his influence."

He used it the way I've told you—with no inhibitions. It was easy to see why Mr. Nahas sweated big drops at the mere thought of squealing on him. If it hadn't been for this

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Sadie kid in his claws I'd have been glad to turn the name into the embassy and consider my job done. Though it wouldn't surprise me if they'd pussy-foot around with diplomatic notes and lose the deal anyhow.

I said to Nahas, "And so you want me to stick my nose into that combine?"

He yammered that it was already in; I'd done the crowd enough damage so that the boss was out for my blood.

I said, "Yes, and I value my blood high. I could call bets off and skip the country safe. But if I deal myself in for you it'll cost you plenty." I didn't tell him I was already dealt in and calling for a showdown for that Sadie kid and I figured, if I could locate his fat Miriam, Sadie would be locked up in the same place—if they were still locked anywhere at all.

He clutched at my arm and waited on me with open mouth. I named a sum offhand. "Five thousand pounds British *and* all expenses. I'm not a one to work out of my own pocket." He swallowed it so easily I wished I'd asked more. I said, "In the Anglo-Iranian bank. Now. And then you can come back and tell me what you know about any hangouts of his, villas, caves, dungeons, what have you."

I sent for Quain to find out what kind of a gang he could drum up amongst his bazaar rogues. You'll understand, of course, this had to be a strictly private war. I couldn't call on the police and I didn't dare go to the embassy with anything that illegal—though I debated a heap whether I should cable the Secretary and remind him about some official protection. But I decided to let it go. His deal with me was to play it lone-handed and not embarrass poor old Uncle's timid foreign policy. And if I did, it would all take time. Time! I had to count it in minutes. And well, it wouldn't be the first time I'd worked with the cops on the other side. It just added another danger and what was one more in this mess?

CHAPTER VI

SMOOTH AS OIL

QUAIN did himself noble. He rounded up as sweet a dozen of renegades as you'd want not to meet on a dark night; four of 'em deserters from three different armies that had been through the country not so long ago.

I met the crowd in a waterfront dive and I told them, "Your pay will be fifty bucks a day; and I'm not hiring trigger-happy guns. You're a commando. Everybody you'll meet will be your enemy and we're up against a hard gang besides. But *everything must be subordinated to the objective.* Every other consideration is secondary. The objective is to raid a villa in Euphrates Valley ten miles this side of Babylon." I had that from Nahas. "We are to rescue a couple of women there. The program is to grab 'em and run. If we can do it fast we may get clear away. If we bungle, there're troops guarding the Hindyiah Dam seven miles from the villa and there's telephone connection to call 'em. If there's trouble you'll scatter just like any other commando and your getaway will be up to you. If you have to shoot it out and you get shot, that's your hard luck. If you shoot anybody, that'll be your hard luck, too, to save your own neck. There'll be just one excuse for unnecessary gunplay. If they've hurt those two girls you may murder the whole damned gang and I'll help you. Fifty bucks a day. Understood?"

Not a one of them had seen as much as fifty in a year. They jumped on the proposition on all fours; and then we planned the details of getting to Babylon by owl hoot trail and which ruin we'd meet in two nights from now. I felt that with a crowd who'd accept those terms we'd at least have a chance, because the other gang couldn't call in the cops any more than we could.

Quain came up with a bit of cheering news where I needed it most. He said, "Bazaar talk is that that French-Syriac son of many fathers who planned some future talk with you on account of his brother, is also the head of those who deal in opium, and he rents out his gang to any who will pay the hire."

That tied it up into a nice compact bundle of dirty family laundry. My forehead still looked like a washboard from his rawhide trick. I whooped. So we'd be meeting again and we'd see who'd run whom out of what country.

Babylon is composed of half ruins inhabited by jackals and half of a swarm of native huts inhabited by pick-and-shovel bandits who hope that more scientists will come to dig for ancient crockery. My crowd crept in with the jackals. One didn't show up. I didn't like that so much; it could be that somebody had raised my fifty-buck ante and would be knowing all about us now. But waiting around wouldn't help anybody but the opposition.

Quain said, "Thus it is better; for it now makes us thirteen." For those people thirteen is a lucky number because three and one add up to four and that is the number of the four archangels who mean the four cosmic forces and the four blessings and a lot of other occult stuff. I hoped it might have something to do with the four freedoms, too, as we set off on our rescue raid.

This villa had its wall, too, of course; there's nobody loves privacy like those Don Juans who build a women's annex to their apartments. The wall made a solid semicircle around the

joint ending in spiked iron grilles out into the river. It stood like an oasis of black sin camouflaged behind its fig and olive trees. Silent enough to look empty.

But we were expected all right; if not tonight, some night soon and those smart apes would be laying for us with machine guns or some nice little welcome behind the garden gate.

But if I drew any luck at all they wouldn't be expecting us from the way we came; because we weren't coming up to any garden gates or scaling any walls. I had taken my gang down river a ways in a brace of get-away cars and we were sneaking up-stream under sail in a native dhow.

And of course the tall olive trees cut the wind from our sail and the blasted dhow drifted all over the Euphrates rather than nose into the bank. I was scared somebody ashore would hear my boys cussing and drop in a faint. But one of those wooden water wheels as big as a Coney Island ferris creaked and screeched by the water's edge enough to cover the landing of a contingent of marines, and only a single back-door watchman came to see what went on. Damn right we were expected!

He came with a tommy gun—they'd been

One of those wooden water wheels creaked and screeched by the water's edge, and only a single watchman came to see what went on.

learning things from the war, these people. He ordered, "Put your hands behind your heads, all of you." But they hadn't learned enough. This poor fool came with a lantern and he thought we were native boatmen drifting aimlessly around the way native boatmen do. That was because we were dressed like the old Boston Tea Party gag. He was tough; he said, "Explain what you do here—or else."

So it had to be quick and silent. I dropped my hand to the knife that had replaced my Damas between my shoulders and stepped forward, my belly crawling for fear he'd blast loose and cut me in half. But I had to get within the three paces that makes the half turn for a throwing knife. That's all a lot more movie baloney that you can throw a knife from any distance. It's got to be three paces approximate or nine more to complete another full turn and present the point.

The gunner didn't shoot but he said, "Stop where you are, fish eater." I stopped dead and the distance was just right. I let go and took him fair in the throat.

He slumped with no more than a wet gasp. I was burning up at having been sold out by that absent man of mine. As smart as grass monkeys, were they? I beckoned my boys together for our last huddle. "Now once more the program. You've all studied the map of the house. A back door and then two more to the main reception room. That's where most of the gang are apt to be who aren't sitting grinning behind their walls. Me and Quain and Heinrich"—that was a tough baby of the renegades—"make our rush for the single door that opens to the women's quarters. The rest of you cover us—and see that you keep us covered. That's all. Simple and fast. Commando style. Hit and run."

They grunted their O.K.'s in half a dozen languages. "So then let's go." I gave the word.

THE raid worked like a lot of other commandos. I had to kick in the back door, but the other two weren't locked. There was the usual doorkeeper at the reception room. I slugged him before he had time to know whether he ought to salaam or yell. We barged in and there was one surprised lot of assembled thugs. But enough of them. They looked to me to be about twenty and they all set up a yelling like a hundred.

I headed my little flying wedge for the harem door and came close to making it without a stop. But a little crowd that had been smelling around there like springtime wolves bunched up and began tugging at their silly concealed-weapon pockets. I clipped one under the ear and Heinrich slammed his big boot into another's groin and we were nearly through. But my old enemy found me out.

Brother Apache's rented gorillas were there in full force and he came howling murder like a devil. He seemed to have learned something about where to keep a gun since the last time. He had it out and came a-shooting. I heard one sing so close that it burned and somebody back of me yelled and then I had to let him have it. I couldn't afford any disarming shots. It had to be sure and center forehead.

And then I was through and heaving at the harem door. I heard Quain's joyful whoop behind me. "So does that one leave the country. Headed for hell!"

The door was locked and I had to shoot the catch and then three of us were in a tangle of musky-smelling passages and brass filigree lamps. Back from the other room there was more shooting and a yelling of all hell right there. It sounded like a battle. I suppose it had been too good to hope we could get by with anything like this without it. But, migod, what a screeching went up from those curtained rooms! Women poured out like rabbits and scuttled screaming—and some of 'em weren't dressed in rabbit skins either. It seemed to me crazy that those gorillas, expecting a fight on their hands, hadn't evacuated; but then, they were Orientals.

I kept yelling through the rooms for my own women. "Sadie! Miriam! Are you here? Where the hell—" A big Amazon who must have had a calf somewhere just about blocked a narrow passage. She wore the left arm bracelet and the forehead disk of a harem strong-arm matron and she had her courage all right. She stuck her thick arms out to stop us. I couldn't waste time. I slapped her ear so my palm tingled and then again on the back hand. She had probably been spanked before and plenty, but not just in that place or so sudden. It shocked some meekness into her. I twisted her around and told her, "Now lead to the American one, and quick."

She stumbled through a couple of rooms and fumbled a key to a door. She was so dizzy she couldn't find the lock. I kicked it in, and there were screeches and then women falling all around my neck. Three of 'em. Sadie was one. I shoved the other two off; there were necks enough for them if they wanted.

I said into Sadie's hair, "Are you hurt? Have they harmed you?"

She wasn't whimpering like the other two. She said, "No. Not yet—but—"

"Then let's go!" I said. "Come on, you fellows! One of these windows!"

Women's quarters windows, of course, have iron bars across them like a jail. But they're for women. Heinrich and I got two bottom ends and between us we heaved the whole sill out. I jumped through and Heinrich passed the girls out. It was black dark and I hoped for the luck that whatever wall guards there had

been would have gone to join the shindig in the house.

We weren't quite that lucky. Some of those hired boys were smart enough to wonder whether their pay was worth that much war. A pair of them loomed up and they were dumb enough to come asking questions in the dark. Quain was ahead of us, feeling out the way; Heinrich and I herding the girls and our hands pretty full. And right there Quain earned all the money I'd ever hoped he'd be worth. I heard one of the shadows gurgle and I knew that Quain had knifed him. I shoved Sadie away from it and plunged ahead. I could hear Heinrich cussing, "Vhere in Gott's name iss that verdamst river?"

And then there was Quain's voice panting, "This way, master. Softly, master. There is no pursuit."

In another minute there was the river and suddenly we could hear the water wheel. If we hadn't been so crazy with the getaway we'd have been hearing it all along. We got to the dhow and nobody else was there. But the rules were, grab the girls and run; that was the objective. We sloshed aboard and shoved off.

Sadie kept telling me I was bleeding; that she could feel it back of my shoulder. All I could tell was that it felt as if I'd jarred it good and hard against something.

Quain said, "Verily, master, it seemed to me that the first shot of that one who is already in hell must have hit you, for you staggered."

Could be, of course, because that maniac had come like a recoil automatic. But we didn't dare anything so silly as making a light to look-see and stick tape right there. The getaway cars were just a couple of miles down, the arrangement, that we'd wait exactly one hour from time of landing and anybody who wasn't there would get back the best way he could—if he got back.

Six of the boys showed up, five of 'em clipped one place or another and bleeding. I timed it to the last minute and said, "O.K., let's get going before law and order from the Hindyiah Dam happens along."

We didn't head for the Babylon warrens. Half a dozen miles of plowing through the sand would put us on the Baghdad road and we'd have to be hurrying up, relieving all the alibies I'd bought and planted.

THE boys gave me the general outline of doings in the big hall. It had been quite a battle from behind chairs and divans and such. Till a couple of flashy-dressed guys who'd been giving the orders went down and then the rest set up a yammering as if they'd lost the paymaster sergeant and jammed the big door in their hurry to get out.

In Baghdad bazaar I shed the boys and the extra girl—she was just another pal of Miriam's—and I told 'em to come and see me on the quiet and there'd be a bonus for the splendid job they had done.

I took my pair on to the hotel and sent Quain for Old Man Nahas.

He came boiling—because Quain had held him up for a handout before he'd tell a thing. Nahas raised my titles to Emperor and Chosen Instrument of God and then he looked over his squealing fat Miriam and damned if he didn't have the gall to demand a refund because she wasn't delivered in good order and condition.

Her abductors had slapped her around a bit to make her confess about her confidential friends and she still carried her bruises. I chased Nahas and my advice to him was he'd better pick up his family and go take a long vacation in some quiet place in Europe before he got repercussions.

Daoud duly came. He said, "I am told that you have been here all the time; which rejoices me, for I would have guessed that somebody left your mark in a place near Babylon."

"Is that so?" I said innocently. "Somebody been shot?"

"Many bodies," he said. "And it rejoices me, too, that we have found out that, under cover of dates, you are really in oil and not in opium; for it seems that two rival opium gangs have had a battle and it is serious for the Prince of—" And then he went cagy and wouldn't mention so well connected a name. He finished, "A prince has been killed."

I couldn't help letting out a whoop. If the boss man had been there in person and got his, that just about closed the book. Daoud looked at me awful hard.

I told him, "My heart came up into my mouth, for I feared for a moment it might be a prince whom I came especially to see about oil. But since this one was in opium—"

Daoud said, "Yes, this one was interested in many shady doings, though he was too big for us to touch. But it is Allah the Just who arranges all things," he finished, and went about his chores.

Quain said, "Would that it had been I was the hand of Allah in this matter; for master will surely double the bonus."

I told him, "Rogue and friend, don't worry about hands that you will never reach. Your bonus that you have earned will set you up as an honest merchant."

He said, "*Allah min'allimak!* God keep me safe from it."

I cabled the Secretary back home, "Found your Leiltak Saida. Opposition somehow disappeared."

He cabled back, "Splendid work. Did you have to marry her?" A right human guy is that Sec, even though a diplomat.

Around the hill and through O'Hara's gulch came the 4:30. The Saint paid not the slightest attention but went on gnawing the bone.

I DON'T get as much mail as I did once, what with one thing and another. Old friends dying, maybe, and me not being a very good correspondent. But I never see a postman in our block now that I don't think of Jeb Partridge.

Jebediah Partridge was what you might call the postman in Weston. Actually, we didn't have a letter-carrier, but Jeb took the outgoing mail from the postoffice to the station, and

ILLUSTRATED BY JOSEPH FARREN

JEBEDIAH AND THE SAINT

By NARD JONES

brought the incoming mail from the station to the postoffice. It was quite a little journey, especially in winter when the snow got deep or there was a silver freeze.

When I lived in Weston, everybody there knew why the station was so far away from town, and we were all pretty indignant about it even after twenty-five years. You see, Weston is on a spur line that runs between Walla Walla, Washington, and Pendleton, Oregon. Unluckily, the big grain elevator and the warehouse for sacked wheat were built quite a spell out of town. The railroad had to make a big half circle out of its way to reach the grain cargo and didn't intend to curve a bit further in order to touch the town itself.

Independent as a hog on ice, the railroad was, and all the petitioning and letter-writing never changed things. Later on, of course, a fine paved highway went right through Wes-

ton and motor busses began to carry the mail and auto freights began carrying cargo. But even when that happened, folks stayed mad at the railroad.

After the highway was built, the railroad stopped running the branch line, which meant that Nels Nelson, the station agent, had to move with his family to some other town. We didn't like that, because the Nelsons were right nice people. It also meant that Jeb Partridge was out of a job, and we didn't like that, either, although by that time he had married into Savannah Gibbs' farm, after courting her off and on for twenty years. Some folks said it was Pa Gibbs' applejack he courted—but that's ahead of the story.

Jeb Partridge was small. He was something like his name, like a partridge, only like a partridge scurrying in the snow, or whirring low away from you. Not like a partridge stalking in the brush or through wheat, all self-contained and sure of itself. And Jeb was brown like a partridge, and his mustache was different colors of brown like you see on a partridge. And he had the eyes of a partridge, come to think of it, sort of unblinking and wary.

Jeb always carried the mail to the station in the old Ford touring car. There were usually not more than three or four sacks of it, since Weston only had about four hundred folks, maybe another hundred and fifty on the rural route. So Jeb had room for the occasional passenger who wanted to take the train, or come into town from the station. He charged a quarter, or whatever they wanted to give him, and that was over and above the wage paid him by the Government. If there was any heavy freight, Hans Peterson took care of it in his wagon. The only time the work was hard was at Christmas and the week the mail order catalogues came out. Then things were bad, especially if the weather was mean. It was wonderful to hear the things Jeb could say when the mail was heavy and the weather bad. You would almost have thought he had been a sailor at one time or another. But, no, he had learned every bit of it right in Umatilla County, and some of it he'd invented all by himself.

I think Jeb Partridge took more joshing than anybody else in town. Maybe this was because he was small and excitable, and anybody who is small and excitable is always sort of funny somehow. He took more jokes than "Poet" Dowson, I know that. "Poet" Dowson wasn't really a poet. His real name was Charley Dowson and he wasn't very bright in the head. He had been called "Poet" for a long time, partly because there was a poet named Ernest Dowson once, but mostly because Weston figured that poets were light in the head but harmless, like Charley.

He took more kidding than Harry Barlemi, too, when Harry first came to town. Harry was the son of the shoemaker, an Armenian. Harry's father had meant to join his brother in a town named "Weston" in some eastern state. But when he got to America he was proud and wouldn't ask any questions. He just bought himself an atlas and looked up "Weston" and the first one he found was in Umatilla County, Oregon. He got out his savings and bought tickets for himself and his wife and Harry, and they came to our town, clear across the country, three thousand miles. When he found out he was in the wrong town, he wouldn't admit it to his wife for a long time, although he liked to tell about it later. He just stayed and started his shoe repair shop.

We had never seen an Armenian, and we had a lot of fun with young Harry at first. We gave him an old gunny sack and took him snipe hunting at dusk. We left him at the bend in the creek and said we would go down and chase up the snipes. Then they would run in a black drove over the snow by the side of the creek, and some would walk into his sack until it was full. "We'll whistle when you are to get ready," he said.

"Ah, yes," said Harry Barlemi, his dark eyes gleaming. "I understand. You will give me the whistling signal."

Then we went home and forgot about him, and he stayed there all through the night. He was at school the next day, half frozen, half starved and very indignant. He still didn't realize the snipe hunt was a joke. He was simply angry that we had not signaled him and was convinced we had driven the snipes the other way and caught them ourselves without letting him share in the spoils.

"You said you would give me the whistling signal!" he cried furiously, as he encountered each of us one by one. "But you do *not* give me the whistling signal! With you I shall not go hunting for snipe again!" We all felt pretty cheap, I can tell you.

That's the way it used to be in a little town, when there was time for joking. But after a while we get tired of baiting folks like Harry Barlemi and "Poet" Dowson. Jeb Partridge was different, some way. He just seemed to soak it up all the time.

WELL, the Nelsons at the railroad had a big St. Bernard dog. He was not more than a puppy, but he was sure big. The Nelsons called him "The Saint" behind his back, and just "Saint" when they were calling him. He had a sad face even for a St. Bernard, but he was the most joyful and friendly animal you ever saw. He took a great liking to Jeb Partridge, seeing him every day twice a day as he did, and at first Jeb took a liking to him. In

front of the station's pot-bellied stove, he would rub The Saint's fur, and would bring him a pocketful of soda biscuits from my father's store—if my father wasn't around when Jeb dropped in.

The dog would watch for Jeb's old Ford coming up the hill and set up a great fuss with his doleful deep bark. Then one day he got the hang of opening the station door; it had one of those black enameled thumb latches and The Saint would simply paw it and heave. That day when he saw Jeb coming, he barged out the door and loped around the corner of the station. There he met Jebediah and there he raised up and put his forepaws lovingly on Jeb's slight shoulders. Standing up, he was a head taller than Jeb, and he weighed more. Jeb and his two mail sacks went down in the snow, with The Saint, faintly puzzled, on top of them. Then, thoughtfully, The Saint got one of Jeb's sleeves in his jaw and helped him up before he was ready.

This all took Jeb completely by surprise, and he didn't say much, although he was put out. But when it happened again next morning, Jeb got excited and he got mad. He told The Saint, in language unbecoming in the presence of a saint, what he thought. Nels Nelson, upstairs in his living quarters, heard the commotion, but Jeb didn't explain when he came in covered with snow from head to feet.

Nels thought this very strange, and that afternoon, when Jeb came with the 4:30 mail, Nels left his ticker and his ticket rack and watched out the window. What he saw—a repeat performance—made him hold his sides. Jeb spluttered into the station delivering a blue-colored monologue. The Saint, standing there listening to Jeb, and observing the satisfaction of his master, was pleased in his vague and puzzled way. It occurred to The Saint that what he had done must be distinctly worth while. He smiled droolingly and wagged his great tail.

You can be sure that Nels told the story next time he got to town. The gang at the drugstore took it up gleefully, for Jeb himself had been very silent about the dog. Usually he related in detail his smallest adventure on the mail route. They guessed shrewdly that his silence on this occasion must mean that Jeb disliked very much being thrown for yardage by a hound every time he rounded the station with mail on his back. They could hardly wait to confront him with the story, and when they did they struck oil.

"Jeb," said Herman Goodwin, druggist and mayor, "what's this about you trying to steal Nels Nelson's dog? Don't you know that's an offense by law—alienating a dog's loyalty to his master?"

Jeb Partridge reddened. I'm not sure that Jeb ever really jumped up and down when he got mad, but somehow it always seemed as if he did. "*Steal* him?" screamed Jeb. "I tell you, I'm going to shoot that—" He looked around quickly to see if there were ladies present. Then, seeing there were not, he selected a number of adjectives he considered appropriate to The Saint, and added, "I'm going to shoot him as sure as you're born!"

But the annoying habit of the dog persisted, and at last Jeb complained to Nels with vigor and with bitterness. "What can I do?" Nels asked. "I can't bolt the station door. People would kick. I can't tie a dog like that inside the station. He'd die of mortification, or yank out the baseboard or whatever we attached the rope to. If I leave him outside, he'll jump you anyhow. Jeb"—Nel's blue eyes twinkled—"why can't you just brace yourself when you come around that corner?"

The real winter of Jeb's discontent came on the day The Saint discovered the stuffing in the uphostery of the Ford. The 4:30, as usual, was late. Jeb was inside, having a pipe with Nels by the stove. Outside, The Saint was examining Jeb's vehicle, and his tearful eyes observed a tuft of white sticking out from the cushion of the front seat. Tentatively he sniffed at it. The odor was not unpleasant. The Saint pulled at it. He found the material inedible but entertaining. The white stuff seemed endless, and The Saint went to work in his patiently destructive way.

When Jeb went out to deposit the incoming mail—with him a very dapper traveling salesman (good for a dollar, certainly)—a strange and maddening sight met his eyes. The worn black cushions were ripped and quite flattened. Spiral springs trembled aloft over the chaos. On the floor before both seats was an untidy mound of brown and white cotton stuffing.

Naturally there had to be a crowd in front of the postoffice when Jeb arrived. He and the traveling salesman were in the front of the old touring car, and they were neither sitting down nor standing up. Jeb maintained his awkward stance by means of the wheel, but the drummer was reduced to clutching the top of the windshield with one hand, and holding to his fedora with the other. Their posteriors just cleared the menacing spiral springs.

Not in many a year had such an entrancing sight been observed on the main street of Weston, Umatilla County, Oregon. Certainly not since Zeke O'Hara's team had run down the north hill, one mare veering to the right side of the ornamental horse trough, the other to the left, leaving the bed of the wagon to the rear. The hay rack, with Zeke in it, kept its forward motion and replaced the statue—"Boy with Fish"—atop the fountain. An awesome and beautiful sight, but without the quality of motion and tragic angry shame pre-

sented by Jeb and the drummer that late afternoon.

IT WAS natural that Jeb should plot revenge. Of course, Nels Nelson bought new cushions for the Ford, and went so far as to build a doghouse for The Saint, chaining him ignominiously during the period of Jeb's visits. But revenge remained in Jeb's heart. He was unmoved by the plaintive gutturals of The Saint, tied to a deep-driven stake. Revenge remained and had no chance to evaporate, because wherever Jebediah went there were always jibes. "Well, and how is dog's best friend, the man?" "What's new from The Saint, Jeb?" "Hey, Jeb, I'm goin' to take the train tomorrow mornin' to Pendleton. How're the cushions in your car standin' up these days?"

Such arrows are more than a man can stand from outrageous fortune. It was not that Jebediah Partridge was a mean man. He had never harmed a fly, much less a dog. He had never hunted either the most insignificant or the most destructive animal or bird. But of one thing he was certain. Something must happen to Nels Nelson's mastiff.

The diabolical solution came to him one day when, oddly enough, The Saint was not tied to his stake and yet was not there to confront Jeb personally. On this particular day, a mild one, Jeb sat on the running board of his car, waiting for the afternoon train. His wandering gaze spotted The Saint far down the track square between the rails, idly and playfully engaged with what seemed to be a bone. Behind the nearest hill of spring wheat, Jeb detected a trail of black smoke. He looked at his thick-nickeled watch and his eyes narrowed, watching now with unfeigned interest, almost with anticipation.

Around the hill and through O'Hara's gulch came the 4:30, and up the long grade. The Saint paid not the slightest attention, but went on gnawing the bone. The engine grew closer, and the whistle blew. It was as if The Saint had not heard.

"Maybe," thought Jebediah, "maybe that danged fool dog will start pawing the engine like he does me." Jeb held his breath. I will not say that he was hoping, nor will I say that he was not hoping.

At the last moment, almost when it seemed too late, The Saint raised his heavy head and regarded the steel monster without apparent interest. Then with bulky dignity he got off the right of way.

When the train had come to a halt in front of the station, the engineer called out, "Nels, some day I'm going to have to make hamburger out of that Shetland hound of yours. He's caching bones between the ties back there!"

Any darned fool dog, thought Jebediah, *any darned fool dog would do that. Something's bound to happen...* Quite clearly Jeb saw that it would happen, sooner or later, simply because The Saint had no regard for logic; had, indeed, no particular capacity for random thought, in Jeb's estimation. It came to Jeb that certainly no harm would accrue from assisting the approach of the inevitable.

That was how Jebediah Partridge happened to be on the railroad track, a quarter of a mile down from the station, that very midnight, carrying with him several large hunks of beef and a ball of stout cord. At intervals Jebediah bound a hunk of beef to the rail, very securely, with the cord. He tried to secure the beef in such a manner that an animal, particularly a stupid animal, would become preoccupied in getting at the meat. Once or twice Jebediah struck a match to observe his handiwork.

Mrs. Nelson noticed the flare of a match on her way from attending to the need of Lars Nelson, age two months. She called her husband's attention to it, and he thought it worth while to investigate. By the time he had dressed and walked down the track, Jeb had gone. But Nels found the hunks of beef near the spot where The Saint had cached his bone.

It was Sim Pinkerton, the postmaster, who brought the mail to the nine o'clock next morning. "Jeb sent word he's got a cold," Sim said. "But he figures he'll be well enough to make the four-thirty this afternoon."

Nels nodded. "I figured he might be a little under the weather this morning."

Sim was about to ask Nels what he meant when a startling apparition met his sight. It was The Saint, but something had happened to him. Instead of being brown and white, he was a gray-white all over, and from his gray-white face the dark eyes were searing and lost. "What in the name of heaven has happened to that hound, Nels?" Sim asked.

"Well, I'll tell you. I combed a little light syrup into his fur, and then I dusted him with flour. It sticks real good."

Sim Pinkerton's mouth dropped open. "Nels, you feeling all right?"

"Sure. And I'll tell you what I got in mind."

As he told Sim what he had in mind, a great slow grin spread over the postmaster's face. "I got to get back to town real quick," he said. "I got to tell the boys at the drugstore."

Jebediah, looking a little pale around the gills, showed up at the postoffice about two o'clock. He glanced at Sim nervously. "I was just over to the drugstore getting me a cigar and they told me about—about Nels' dog."

"Yeah. Reckon you're glad." Sim Pinkerton went on sorting mail.

Jeb started. "No," he said quickly. "I ain't glad. Not exactly." He straightened his bird-like shoulders. "Of course, it ain't like I had

any reason to be *sorry*." He stopped. Then it rushed out: "But I ain't glad, Sim."

"Sure was the end of that hound," Sim said. "Scattered him from O'Hara's gulch to Pendleton, I reckon. He'd always got off the track before. But this time he didn't and it sort of surprised the engineer. Nels is real busted up about it."

JEB PARTRIDGE piloted the old Ford up the hill toward the station. He had a troubled heart and a troubled soul. Hesitantly, he climbed from the seat, dragging the mail sacks after him. At the corner of the station he braced himself unconsciously, yet knowing full well that no friendly St. Bernard would be there to greet him effusively.

Rounding the corner, he stopped in his tracks. A hundred yards away the pale and ghostly Saint stared at him. From out the white face the dark eyes gleamed in sad recognition. The mouth opened, but there emanated only a faint yawp. The Saint felt downhearted and ashamed, and in no mood for frolic. The indignity of light syrup and household flour had got him down. He lay prone and quiescent, like a canine angel no longer concerned with the cares of the earth.

At that moment the door opened and Nels came out. "What's wrong, Jeb?"

Jeb's eyes never left The Saint. They couldn't. "I—I thought you said the Saint was —was run over by the morning train."

"And that's a fact, he was," said Nels sadly. "Took him off cleaner than a whistle. I ain't even found a hair on the tracks." The station agent sighed. "He was a good dog. A high-bred animal. A faithful beast."

Jeb swallowed, and pointed. "What're you pointing at?" Nels wanted to know. "Oh, The Saint's doghouse? I was going to break it up into kindling, but I hardly got the heart to do it. You want it, Jeb?"

At last Jeb found his voice. "Nels, you always were a joker. I'm sure glad the dog is all right." He pointed again, uncertainly. "There he is, right there, but what's he been rolling in?"

Nels turned and looked. Then his glance went back to Jeb. "What're you talking about, Jebediah?"

"The Saint. That's him. Right there."

Nels looked again toward the doghouse. This time when he returned his gaze to Jeb there was a well-feigned concern in his face. "What's ailing you, Jeb? There's no more dog there than there is an elephant. I only wish there was."

There was a pleading hopelessness in Jeb's eyes. "Nels, that dog is right there." He pointed again.

"Jeb, if there's a dog there, then I'm not standing here. If there's a dog there, go and pet him."

Jeb shook his head and backed away. "No. . ." he said. "No, thanks. I guess I—" He kept backing up until he had turned the corner and reached the old Ford. Then he backed the Ford into the road, and wheeled it around toward town, heedless of the slippery mud.

"I guess I'll go court Savannah Gibbs," he muttered hysterically to himself. "Haven't been over there in more than a month." He put the Ford in the old garage on Water Street, and started out on foot for the Gibbs ranch. He never took the Ford to the Gibbs ranch on account of Pa Gibbs' applejack, the slightest drop of which turned gasoline sour. "There was a dog there," he said to himself, starting out across the field at the edge of town. "And it was The Saint." But pretty soon he was walking so fast that he had to run to keep up with himself.

Savannah Gibbs was mending a pair of her pa's overalls when Jeb got there. Jeb called on Savannah about ten or twelve times a year, and although she hadn't seen him in more than a month she showed no surprise. Savannah was somewhere past forty, but just how far past you couldn't tell. She was as solid as Jeb was slight, and as stolid as he was excitable. It was not an unusual combination in that part of Oregon and everybody said they would make a good couple, if Jebediah ever proposed.

Savannah put her mending down on her ample lap and observed at once the change in Jeb. "Jeb Partridge, what ails you?" she said.

"Nothing. Nothing, Savvy. It's a mite cold outside. That's why I'm shaking."

"I'll get you a glass of Pa's applejack," said Savannah, rising.

While she was in the cellar, Pa Gibbs came in from milking. He welcomed Jeb effusively. Savannah didn't mind if he had a glass of his own applejack with company, but she wouldn't ever let him drink it alone. He called down the cellar, "Savvy, you mind if I join Jeb in a glass?"

In a moment Savannah appeared with two heavy tumblers three-quarters filled with amber fluid. "Just one," she said to Pa Gibbs. "I'll set the supper on directly."

With Savannah in the kitchen, Pa managed to get to the cellar from the outside, and he and Jeb had another glass before supper was ready. Two were enough to carry them through corn bread, hog shoulder, mashed potatoes, butter beans, and pie. And after supper they had another one—while Savannah cleaned up the dishes.

"What you so danged quiet about, Jeb?" Pa asked at last. "You hardly said a word all evening."

"I got things on my mind," Jeb said carefully. "Nothing special."

After the dishes, Savannah finished her mending, listening to Pa and Jeb and not saying a word. Promptly at nine o'clock she got up and said, "I'm going to bed. Pa, you come, too, in half an hour." She looked at Jebediah and her black eyes softened a little behind her glasses. "Right nice of you to call, Jebediah."

Pa looked at Jeb sheepishly. They knew that in half an hour Savvy would be dead to the world. After fifteen minutes had gone by, Pa sneaked down cellar and brought up the jug. "This here," he said to Jeb in a low voice, "is good for things on your mind." He poured. "You worried about getting married or not getting married, Jeb? You been courting Savvy like this now for a mighty long time. You scared or something?"

"That's not it," Jeb said. "I wan't thinking about marrying tonight, one way or the other."

"Well," said Pa, motioning toward the jug, "this is good for it, whatever it is."

"I don't know," said Jeb skeptically. But he took up the jug.

AROUND ten-thirty Jeb began making tracks in the snow from the Gibbs farm. They were erratic tracks, and unbeknownst to Jeb they veered more toward the station than toward the town. There were several immediate reasons for this. One was that Jeb's business usually took him toward the station, and now that his consciousness was on temporary leave, his subconscious was in charge. Another reason was that Jeb could not now compensate for the rotation of the earth; he kept veering and tottering away from the direction of the earth's turning. Of course, the *basic* reason was the applejack. The great majority of alcoholic beverages will to some extent respond to exercise and sharp fresh air. This was never quite true of Pa Gibbs' applejack. At last Jebediah sat down quietly in the snow and blinked into the night.

As he blinked he became aware of something approaching. At first he thought it was a cow. Then he thought it might be a coyote, but not even this possibility caused him to move. What caused him to move was the fact that the thing began to take the shape of The Saint, a Saint whose pallor made him all but invisible against the snow.

Jeb got to his feet and backed away. Unable to make sufficient progress by this method, he turned and ran. He fell headlong, once, twice, three times, and pulled up to run again. He could hear himself grunt and he thought he could hear his heart pounding. When he fell down again he knew that he could never get up, and that was the last thing he did know.

The Saint had been bounding after him, but when Jebediah fell, to remain motionless, the big dog plowed to a stop. He stood perplexed for a moment. Then he went to Jebediah, cautiously, and sniffed. He barked, but still Jeb did not move. The Saint tried coaxing him with play; he growled, and bounded around Jebediah in a clumsy circle.

There was no response and The Saint grew worried. He raised his massive head to survey the surroundings. Jeb's flight had covered considerable distance back over the way he had come, and The Saint detected the smells of the Gibbs farmyard. Then his doleful eyes made out the outlines of the house and barn. He looked again at Jebediah and decided upon his course of action. Gently but firmly he took a shoulder of Jeb's leather jacket in his jaws and began to pull. He needed to rest only twice before he got Jeb Partridge to the Gibbs porch.

There he released his burden and set up a howl. For a long time nothing happened; then the window of Savannah's bedroom flung upward and she stuck out her head, curl-papers and all. "Go away!" she told The Saint. She could not see Jebediah in the shadows.

When The Saint seemed uninterested in pursuing his way, Savannah withdrew into her bedroom to reappear with a heavy bell minus its clapper, an article which did service as a door-stop. She aimed this at The Saint and her aim was good. But The Saint's hide and fur were thick and he was hurt only spiritually. After a moment he set up another howl.

This was too much, Savannah decided. She slid into her slippers and took the air gun from behind the door. An air gun, she decided, would not cripple The Saint but it would discourage him, especially if she aimed it from the porch below.

The Saint saw the light go on in the front hall, and he saw Savannah come out onto the porch in her flannel nightgown. He heard Savannah's little cry as she saw Jeb lying there. It did not matter that she forgot all about him. He just stood here until Savannah had carried Jebediah's slight form into the house and shut the door. Then he trotted back

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happily toward the station, content to leave Jebediah in the hands of the capable and loving Savannah.

Savannah's yelling from the window had partially aroused Pa Gibbs. Her scream from below completed the job. Pa got up out of bed and stood uncertainly in his underwear. Then he padded down to Savvy's room and saw the empty bed.

Forthwith, he took down his shotgun from its peg on the wall and came stealthily downstairs.

What he saw horrified him. Jebediah Partridge was propped up on the davenport like a half-filled sack of wheat. He leaned in a daze on Savannah's shoulder. It mattered not at all to Pa Gibbs that Savannah's flannel nightgown was more voluminous and more all-covering than her daytime mother hubbards. The fact remained that Savvy was in her night clothes.

"Jeb," said Pa Gibbs in an awful voice. "Jeb Partridge, you little sneak in the grass. I'm surprised at you. Thought you was a friend of mine and a gentleman."

Jebediah opened his eyes. He tried to sit up straighter. He did not remember leaving the house, and he could not understand why Savannah was in her nightgown or why Pa Gibbs looked so mad and carried a shotgun.

"You," went on Pa Gibbs, "you sit here tonight and drink my applejack and eat my food and tell me you're not thinking about marrying Savannah. You have the gall to admit that, and then, when I'm in bed, you sneak back here. As for you, Savvy . . ." he turned to his daughter. "As for you, I don't know what I can say." Pa Gibbs lowered his head a moment as if in shame. Then he lifted it proudly.

"Jeb and Savvy, I don't think there's anything you can dare tell me except that you're going to be married, and right away. Leastways," he added, "as soon as the Reverend Graham gets himself out of bed and over here for the ceremony. Shouldn't have to wait more'n a couple of hours."

Jeb looked helplessly at Savannah, for explanation, for assistance. Savannah was studying her hands, her head down.

At last she said quietly, "I guess Pa's right, Jebediah."

"But, Savvy . . ." Jeb's voice broke and trailed off.

"No," said Savannah. "Pa's right."

"But look," said Jeb. "there's something I got to tell you. It's about that big dog of Nels Nelson's—"

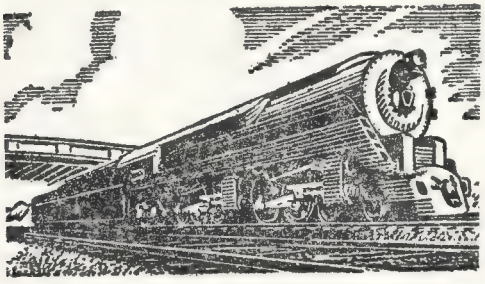
Savannah thought he was beginning to remember how he had got back to the house. Quickly she interrupted. "I know all about it, Jebediah. But Pa's right."

"You mean you know about it?" Jebediah said. He could not believe his ears. "And you'd still marry me?"

"Pa's still right, no matter what," said Savannah. She got up. "I'll go upstairs and get dressed, Pa."

"I should be thinking as much," said Pa Gibbs, sitting down across from Jeb. "Reverend Graham will be up to his breakfast in about four hours."

He reached around in back of his chair and his fingers felt the familiar neck of the applejack jug. After all, a man certainly should be entitled to a nip on the day his only daughter marries.



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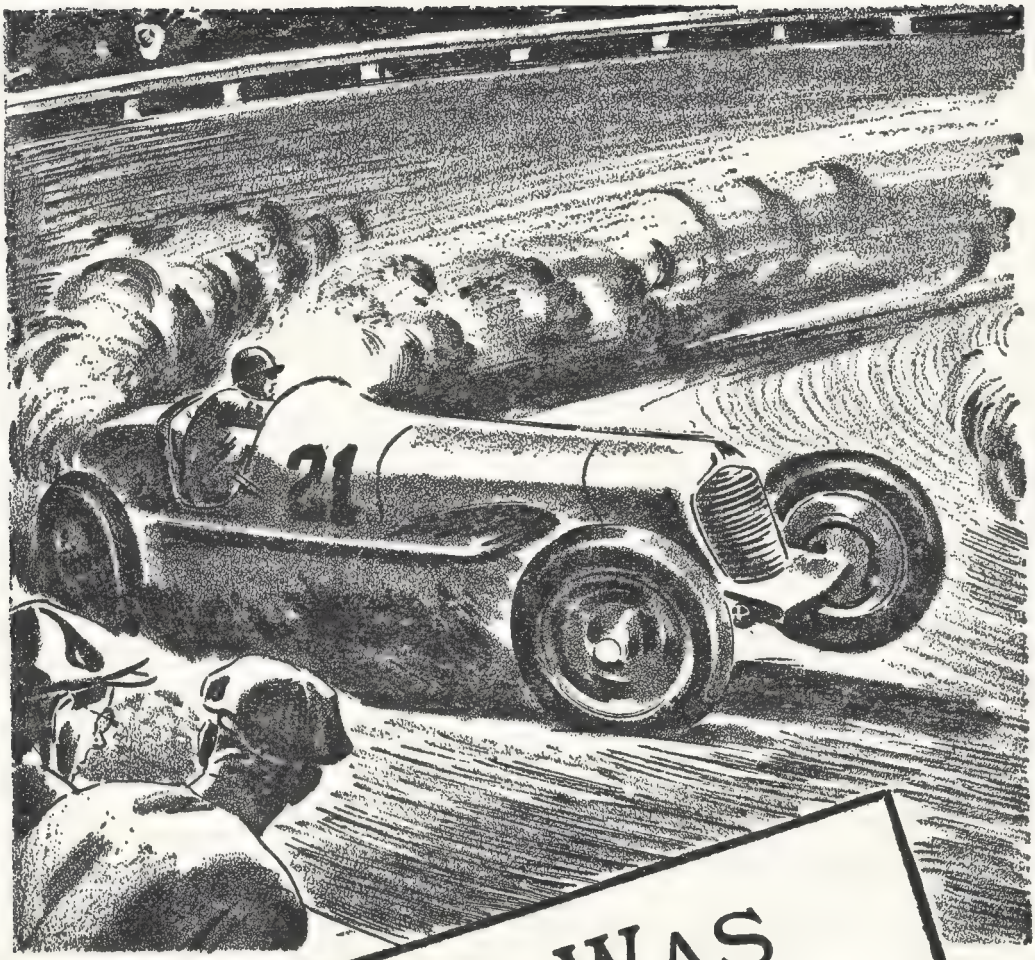
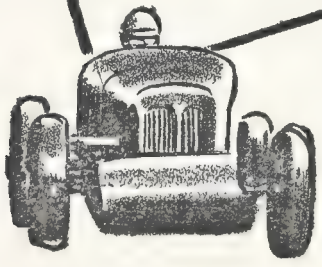
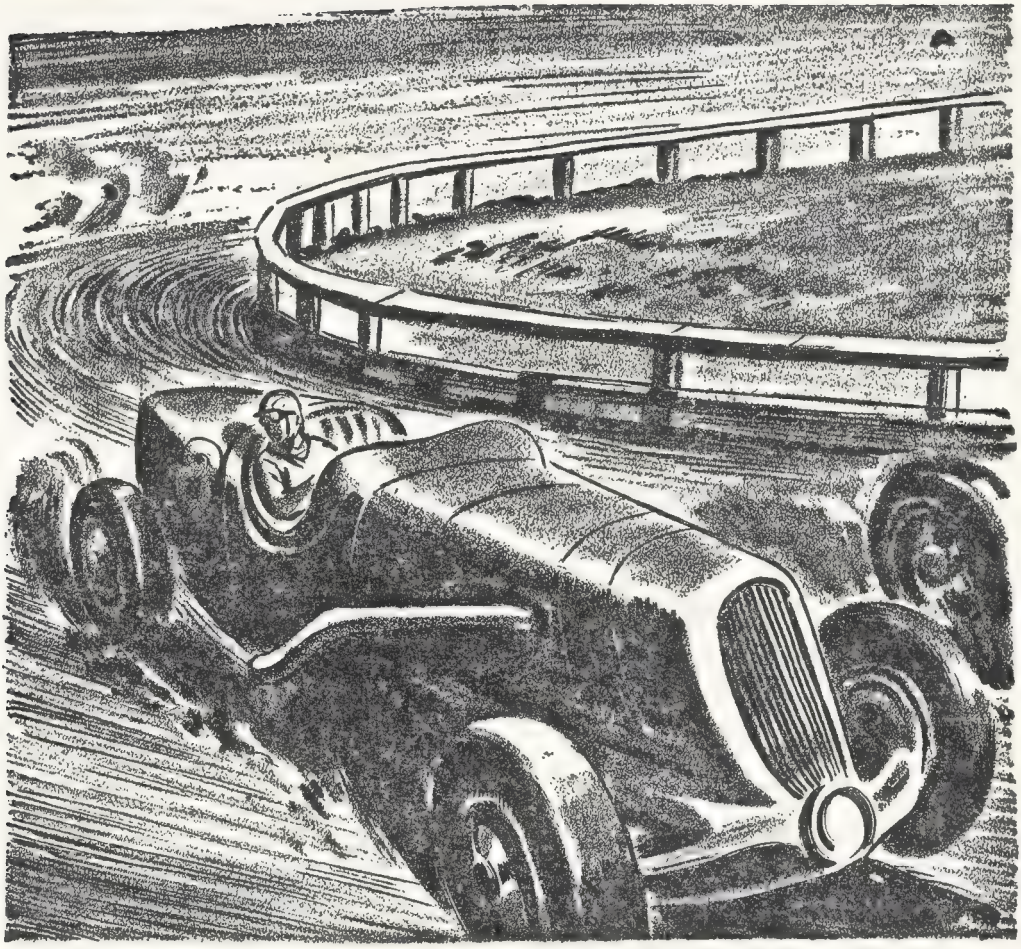


ADAM WAS A CHUMP



ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN MEOLA

I'VE always entertained a private suspicion that Adam was a chump and most of the records, right from Dante on down to Kathleen Winsor, seem to bear me out. Eve had, if memory serves correctly, nothing much more than a fig leaf; D'Artagnan laid his own carcass on the line and slit a few odd throats for a high coiffure and a revealing neckline. And guys are still doing as much for properly-filled nylons and a skirt that ends at the knee. So it isn't too much a matter of geography or time. It's just that Adam was slightly wacky.



By
COLEMAN
MEYER

The kid was close to the rail by the end of the grandstand. I saw the wheels cock over, heard the engine come off, and then the back wheels bit as he poured on the coal.

I can see that you're not in complete agreement. Well, let's put it this way—some guys wear lodge pins to prove that they are or have been Past Grand Master of the Fire Axe or Imperial High Potentate of the Royal Nightshirt. I wear this finger—that's right, that ragged one in the middle—just to prove my right to the assertion that Adam should have hung on to that extra rib. And here's the story that goes with it: It's a story you may find hard to believe, but, cross my heart, it's the straight dope:

IT WAS just before the war when I first met this kid. We were at the Oakland Speedway for the 200-mile Grand National which, in case you don't know it, isn't grand and the payoff wouldn't exactly rival the national debt. Anyhow it was a racetrack in the "B" circuit and all the brethren were there.

I was in my pit wondering a little dourly just why I continued to monkey around with the racing business. I majored in engineering at M.I.T. more years ago than I like to remember,

got interested in cam actions and found that I couldn't secure reasoned reports from lads who knew only that a racecar either ran or it didn't but were very vague as to why. I drove a meet or two myself and suddenly learned that the application of some very ordinary engineering principles could keep you alive for a long time in a business that indolently followed the sunshine and didn't demand too much in the way of effort.

During the past fifteen or eighteen years I had amassed a fair reputation, a reasonable number of gray hairs and sufficient thrills to take care of this lifetime and most of the next.

I had just shifted over to puzzling out why my Cragar gulped sparkplugs as if they were free, when the kid came rolling into the pit next to mine. Ordinarily I don't pay a lot of attention to other guys but this boiler was so outstanding that I thought for a minute he was on the wrong racetrack. It was a brand-new Miller with a slick white paint-job and every bit of tread on the hoops.

You just don't see hoops like that on the kerosene circuit. Most of the lads, newcomers, that is, are lucky if they can start the season with new rags and then they trust to luck and low horsepower to keep the tread print showing.

A big, tall kid clambered out of the cockpit and he was as virgin as the Miller—a gleaming and undented crash-helmet, clean, yellow pigskin gloves and even a scared look. That scared look wears the same as everything else in the racing business. When it's brand-new it has a sort of amazed cast, indicating the astonishment of your head over the foot that rushed you into the last corner; when you've been around as long as I have it's merely a set of craggy wrinkles reflecting perpetual amazement that you are alive today and complete pessimism over the prospects for tomorrow. The kid's was brand-new.

He stood around for a moment, then came over to my pit. He didn't say anything for a while, just stood there balling the yellow gloves.

"Mr. Holman," he finally ventured. Imagine! "Mr." on a racetrack. "I'd like your opinion on this car. It doesn't seem to handle right. Do you think there could be something wrong in the weight distribution?"

"Why?" I asked.

"Well, sir, I don't know. It seems to slide terribly easy on the turns."

I grunted. It was impolite, I guess but hell! —there've been a thousand of those frames made and all the rest of them ran all right. There's only one reason they slide.

"Son," I said, "there's usually only one reason for them doing that. And it's easily corrected. You just put your foot on the gun—all the way down!"

A slow flush mounted his cheeks. "Oh," he said. "I see." He stood there for a moment, muddling the yellow gloves in the crown of the new helmet. "I see." Then he walked away.

I was out on the back-stretch half an hour later, waiting for the water temperature to come up, when an iron came by on the high side. It was the new Miller and the new helmet and the new gloves. I had enough water heat for anything but a wide-open run all the way around, and besides I had more than a little curiosity, so I tacked on for the stretch run and we hit the west turn together. I put the front wheels right up against his tail for a formation corner and we squeaked the bend at around 5000 revs. It wasn't fast but it meant that we'd get out of this turn with enough speed for a real run at the next corner.

I left the nose right against him for the home-stretch and by the time we drummed the straightaway the revs were just edging the red sector on the tachometer. Oakland has a high bank for a mile track and I have a higher regard for my neck, so a sixth sense pulled the nose of my iron away from the tail of the Miller and I took the flat on the inside.

I watched from there and held position. The white Miller was really streaming out the notes and I could see the tail getting light. It was just the point for a quick jump-down.

Abruptly the motor died as the throttle cut it. The tail drifted for a moment. You could almost feel the Miller waiting for the horsepower to pick up the drift. Then it did a slow, half lock-slide with the glittering tail just missing the outside fence and headed for the infield.

A cab driver could have done a better job.

THAT night I was firing up my first and last cigar of the day in the lobby of the St. Charles where the racing gang stays. The kid came walking through the lobby. He saw me and that flush mounted on his cheeks again. He passed by, hesitated and then came back.

"That was you below me on the turn today, wasn't it?" he asked.

I nodded.

"That's—that's . . ." he stammered. "That's what I was asking you about, the way the tail slides. . . ."

I looked up at him, hard. I didn't say anything.

His face crimsoned anew, like a guy holding his breath.

"Well, it slides . . . it just seems to get away," he blurted. "I just get it pointed—"

"Remember what I told you this afternoon?" I broke in. "It still goes."

He stiffened and froze. "I'm sorry. Forgive me for bothering you, will you?"

That tore the bag. I didn't know what the racing business was coming to when guys said, "Forgive me." Most of the punks I knew would have asked what the hell was eatin' *me*. Besides

he was the first lad I'd talked to in a long time who sounded his "G's."

"Look, son," I said, "sit down. What's the score? You can't be as green as you look. Not with an iron that half the youngsters in this circuit would trade their chances in heaven for. And toss in an arm to boot."

He sat down in the big overstuffed chair next to mine. "It's just—it's just," he floundered. Then his words tumbled forth. "I'm Chris Benchley." As though that explained everything.

"That shouldn't be too much of a handicap," I said dryly. The newspapers had made much ado about the wealthy Mr. Benchley and his yachting and his two million dollars and his six-goal rating and had stressed heavily the fact that he was placing his checkbook in jeopardy by his proximity to racing automobiles.

"Christopher Oscar Benchley," he insisted.

"So . . ."

"Well, the name for one thing," he went on miserably. "A couple of uncles and I get saddled with a thing like that. Then, I seem to have too much money."

"Some people—the stronger types—have borne up under that handicap," I interjected solemnly.

"You don't understand, Mr. Holman. It isn't the money, it's the things that money buys. All my life I've wanted to do something by myself, something I could do just as well or better than anyone else simply because I'm me and not because I have the money to buy the things to do it with. But it never seems to come out that way. I've never been anything but third best. I was third on the boxing team at school. I'm third high goal on the polo team. I was third boat on the coast last year and they said I bought the Number One boat. That's the way it goes.

I've been around a long time. "Who's the girl?" I asked.

The crimson on his face deepened. "Well . . ." He halted.

The revolving door leading to the lobby spun once, hit the jackpot and paid off in a vision; I guess vision will do as a word if visions come in tailored jackets right out of *Vogue*. She was just a kid—twenty, I guess—but she had everything that goes with twenty; slim and straight with a hair-do that turned her honey-colored head into something that stopped the lobby pinball game and brought the entire cigar counter to an abrupt about-face. She flashed a smile that was Pepsodent in Technicolor.

"Hi, Chris."

The kid mumbled something but it didn't matter. She wasn't waiting for a reply. In the same breath she said to me, "You're Smoky Bill Holman, aren't you? I saw you at the track today. I've heard so much about you that I feel almost as if we're old friends. I'm Peg Bayliss."

"Delighted, I'm sure, Miss—or is it Mrs.?—Bayliss."

She laughed and the angels sang. "It's Miss. But I could be interested."

I took a look at Chris standing beside me and one glance made the answer to the question I had asked him unnecessary. His heart was resting right on the bridge of his nose, looking out from between his eyes. He didn't say anything, just gulped. She paid him the same attention she bestowed on the potted palm that adorned the lobby. Even so the palm seemed to preen a bit.

"Have you seen Chris' car, Mr. Holman? What do you think of it? Think it might win?" The word came in a breathful.

"Looks all right," I answered cautiously. "Probably will be right up there after the flag drops."

The angels sang again and they had little tinkling bells for a background. "Not with Chris." She turned eyes that were sapphires crushed and strained and then mixed with golden flecks of cream on him. "How about it, Old Safety First?"

The red flamed afresh in the face of the tall youngster beside me and his misery stifled off his words. It didn't seem to make much difference because she turned to me without waiting for his reply. "Hope I'll see you tomorrow—Bill. I've got to run. 'By, Chris."

She was gone in a swirl of skirts that disclosed the reason legs are sometimes called limbs.

I looked at Chris out of the corner of my eye. "So that's the girl, eh, son?"

He nodded abjectly. "I want to marry her."

I had to grin at that one. "There's nothing so unusual about that," I answered. "From where I'm standing I'd make book that the other two hundred and twenty-seven guys in this lobby do, too."

"It's always been that way," he said. "We went to school together. And she went with the captain of the ball team in grammar, the captain of the swimming team in high school and the captain of the boxing team in college. It's always captains and it always seems as though I'm first sergeant."

"Well, why the racing business? I don't get the connection."

"Oh, this is her hobby of the moment," he confessed wearily. "She's been running around with some Los Angeles race driver. This isn't the first time. Two years ago it was a diver. Last year it was a flier. I tried diving and got so sick from the greasy feel of things underwater that I nearly ruined a good diving suit. Took up flying and that made me feel worse. I got as far as solo and bumped into a cross-

wind on my first landing. It wrinkled the plane up considerably and myself a little. I never got any farther than that because this racing business came into the picture.

"The damn thing scares me to death and I get a funny feeling when it starts to slide." He paused and took a deep breath. "Frankly, Mr. Holman, I'm afraid of a lot of things but I think I'm more afraid of being afraid. I think I should be able to do *something* well or reasonably well. It's actually getting so that Peg is more or less secondary."

I had been doing a bit of thinking. "Son," I said, "advice is a poor commodity with the wrong price tag. It's free and therefore most of it is bad. Look me up tomorrow morning. Early!" I left him with that.

THE kid was in his pit next to mine. The Miller was there, too. His eyes were following me but he didn't speak. I went over to Arne Bruges. Arne had a two-seater Indianapolis job on hand and it took only a moment to borrow it. My hand waved the kid over.

"Get in," I said and heaved my two hundred pounds into the mech's seat. "These all run alike. This only has a two-speed box so don't tear the gears out. I borrowed it."

A tow car picked us up and the two-seater snorted with a good healthy note. We lapped twice with the reins tight and my voice was in his ears. "Take it easy. Take a lap or two to get the feel of it before you jump on it." He nodded, eyes fixed straight ahead on the ribbon of semi-macadam that unwound ahead of us.

I sat back and watched him and suddenly found myself approving. Chris handled a race car the way it should be handled. Gently but firmly. The wheel was smooth in his hands and the throttle came down steadily, not in those vicious, axle-breaking jumps that novices usually employ. There's a time and place for that kind of technique but warm-up laps are neither. The tach crawled steadily upward as we drummed down the straight, held steady on the corner and then headed for the green on the back-stretch.

I noticed his hands gripping the wheel more tightly as the west turn loomed. The two-seated was smoking now and would have been a reasonable handful for any man, but only a reasonable handful; a racing man would have to make thousands of them like that without being on the narrow edge. Then the throttle held at that point, the engine softened and we tightened the belt on the turn. I didn't say anything but I knew then what was happening inside the stomach of the white-helmeted boy beside me. I've had butterflies, too.

The grandstand straight was a sizzler. We had a good run from the west turn and the two-seater's tach edged the red by the starting line, wavered up to the center of the crimson sector by the end of the grandstand. Then we were in the turn.

I took a deep breath, kept trying to remind myself that I had lived long enough anyhow and then, as his foot lifted, I slid my big shoe on top of his and stepped down—hard!

The two-seater let go with a scream that scared hell out of me. The slack was on the back axle, we were ready for the turn and a hundred and eighty bellowing horsepower picked up the slack and broke the wheels loose in a terrifying bellow that slammed the tach needle against the pin!

The tail headed for the outer fence. I ducked my head and murmured a tabloid prayer that my hunch had been right.

For the merest fraction of an instant his hands relaxed as though to let go of the wheel, then, from the corner of my goggles, I saw his shoulders stiffen. Fingers only, on the wheel, he played it to the fence. It was a nice job. The track was soft on top and screeching rubber was sending a spume of black dirt high over the crash wall; the tail was brushing the boards and only smooth, steady fingers were filching the needed inches from the grasp of centrifugal force. My foot was still holding the engine pegged and the two-seater had to be driven out of it; it couldn't be throttled out. The gap widened slowly between the tail and the fence, and the two-seater, only a whisper away from a lock-slide, dropped the nose gingerly from the top bank.

Chris could drive. He had that certain something you either have or you haven't. It's a matter of pressures, with no scales handy. Too much and they dig you out of the infield; too little and they put new boards in the fence. You can just do it or you can't. He could.

The hundred and eighty horses thundered out of the corner onto the back-stretch. The tach hand was still up in government figures. I took my foot from atop his. His white-helmeted head turned and lips that matched the headgear uttered only a brief word. "Thanks," was all he said.

I thought of my arteries and yelled in his ear to make the pits.

I left him there, thanked Arne for the car and headed for my own place of business. I had a bit of racing of my own to attend to and the only thing that would tell the story so far as Chris was concerned was the time trials. Talking about it wouldn't help.

The time trials started at eleven and I did my bit for God, for country and for Holman with a thirty-nine-second ride that assured me a place in the main. I joined the rail birds as soon as I got out of the car and sat there waiting for the kid.

He was 'way down the line and seventeen or

eighteen ran before I saw the white Miller jerk to the towline, harrumph as the clutch bit and then chuff off in that particular fashion that signalizes a good, hot engine running under wraps. He took his warm-up at a good clip and I stood up on the rail to follow him for five thousand feet.

It was none of my damn business what he did with his life. That was a matter that concerned only him and his insurance company. But somehow I had a stake in this; wide open corners are a bad habit unless you can finish what you start when you're once in the turn under full bore. The motor level of the Miller didn't rise until two full laps had gone by and the kid ignored the impatient wave of the starter. I gave him full marks on that; most amateurs run good engines into bad reputations by failing to wait for proper oil heat. Starters are always impatient anyhow.

On the back-stretch the Miller started to peak. It rounded the west turn smoothly, came out of the corner with the revs well up and then hit the home-stretch ready to run for the flag. Then the wheels straightened and the engine commenced to howl. The notes went up like a siren, the green flag came down and the Miller charged for the far turn. It was blurring the stretch and the revs went right up into the hollow sound that tells you you're flying.

The kid was close to the rail by the end of the grandstand—right in the slot and set for a superb lap. I saw the wheels cock over, heard the engine come off for an instant and then the back wheels bit as he poured on the coal.

As abruptly as the engine bellows, it died! I couldn't restrain a groan.

The mill just stayed off. There was nothing to push the front end forward and the tail slid for the fence. The wheels came to full lock, the Miller shuddered sideways, whipped viciously the other way, reversed the turn again and finished by sliding up the bank backwards.

The clutch came out and it rolled slowly to the infield. A towcar dashed up and I got slowly off the fence. I didn't bother to look up as I heard the engine restart or to watch the qualifying lap. I knew what it would be. Probably forty-four or forty-five seconds. And I knew that that frozen fear that had pulled his foot off the throttle had damn near killed him.

THE Miller came rolling into the pit and I walked over. My mind was made up now.

Chris got out of the cockpit stiffly, spoke to the two boys helping him. "Load it up, will you?" His tone was bitter.

I shook my head "Never mind doing that, Chris. I want you to run."

He looked at me in amazement and I confirmed my words with a nod. "I want you to run. You'll be in the last heat and a win will put you in the main. Go on up in the grandstand. Get yourself a coke. This doesn't seem to take the throttle right and I'd better have a look at the carburetor. Mind?"

His look was grateful and he walked across the track.

I called one of my boys over. "Larry! Get the hood up on this thing and drop the pot off."

He looked at me curiously, picked up some wrenches and went to work, still eyeing me but asking no questions. I went to the tool box on my trailer, picked up some gadgets and a small

THE ISLAND OF CAPTAIN SPARROW

By S. Fowler Wright

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power drill I always carry. The restrooms are inside the infield fence. I took the carburetor Larry handed me and vanished inside the little brick house.

It was about twenty minutes later when I mounted the carburetor. I did it myself and made a few adjustments. Then I buttoned the hood down and went back to my own pit.

The first five heats were run off and I took care of my personal business in the first one. The last one came up with six cars, first and second place to the main event and the remainder to the consolation. The white Miller rolled out with the group. Chris hoisted himself in at the starting line and sat there, nervously fingering the pigskin gloves as the announcing horns boomed the introductions.

I walked over and put a hand on his shoulder. "You'll do all right, son. Will you listen carefully and do precisely as I say?"

The white-helmeted head nodded. He polished his goggles for the hundredth time.

"You'll push start. Don't pump the throttle. Just ease it in and stay up with the group. Hold your place. Don't!—under any circumstances—floor it until the flag has dropped and you're in the first corner. Understand? *Don't* floor it until after the flag has dropped and you're ready for the turn!"

He looked at me in puzzled fashion. His lips framed a question but I walked away just as the starter's voice called, "Roll 'em!"

The silence was broken as the six cars snuffled off. The three lead cars towed—that's the hard-starting iron. The tail cars pushed and bean oil drifted back to the pits as snap-throttles cleared the engines.

Larry, alongside me on the wide pit rail, looked at me with a question in his eyes. "What the hell's going on?"

"I don't know, Larry," I answered soberly. "The kid can herd anything on this track until he feels the gun hit the floor. Then he goes into a mental lock-slide. Maybe I've done something for him. And then again maybe I've done something *to* him. Watch!"

I didn't bother with the back-stretch alignment. I just listened until I caught the merging of the engine beats and knew it was a good start. Two abreast they came off the home-stretch bank and I didn't need the whipping flag of the starter in his tiny perch to tell me it was a good one. The flag touched off mechanical frenzy as six engines reached for the peak. The white Miller dropped back slightly.

They streaked up the straightaway, charging for the first turn. The Miller was five lengths to the rear now. Five feet lifted from the accelerators, five stacks spat blobs of smoke as the engines were gunned. It was in that instant before the five caught that I heard the Miller. It hazed for a second, then suddenly

The engine died as the flag dropped. The white Miller coasted silently to the stall.

came back with a full-throated roar and leaped for the turn. In two seconds it was a rocketing bullet.

There was a tiny hole on the outside, right up against the fence. It slashed through the hole, passed a man, slid with the tail just powder-puffing the rail. Then I saw it wrench to the infield and the rear end came around in a wide slide. The throttle was full on!

As instantaneously as it slid, it straightened out, rounded the center of the turn in a long, controlled slide. I watched the front wheels saw gently against the forces that sought to heave it up against the outside rail. And I saw the white nose steam by the second man.

The cornering was terrific. The wheels slid into alignment as it came out of the turn and the Miller seemed to fly as it settled into a stern chase for the three cars ahead.

I was listening more than watching now. There was the faintest break as the end of the back-stretch was reached—just that lessening of throttle that put slack in the axle and then the whamming crack as the gun was floored. The white tail obediently cocked for the fence and the white Miller rode the turn as though on rails in a sweeping, smooth, controlled slide.

I took a breath and suddenly realized that

it was the first one since the heat had started. Chris was in hand now. The white car was jumping the stretch in those seven-league leaps that only real horsepower produces. He took another lad on the home-stretch and then cleared the leader in one of those driving, full-throttled corners.

Out in the fresh air, the Miller continued to roll—fast. I was revolving on the rail watching the kid go. At seven he was half a lap in the breeze and driving as though the furies pursued him.

It wasn't any contest but even so the crowd cheered him on, seeming to sense that something was going on that merited their approval although they didn't know what it was. I got down from the pit rail and took my eyes from the white car. It was well in hand.

A sudden, multi-tongued "Ahhh" from the grandstand jumped me back to the rail, my eyes frantically searching the track. They caught a streaming column of smoke pouring from the pockpit of the streaking white car on the back-stretch.

Chris' path was plainly marked. There was a mile and a half to go, perhaps a full minute. Twenty seconds of that minute brought him by the pits. I could see the white helmet down inside the cockpit. It came up for a moment to check his path and then the throttle hit the floor again.

His right shoulder was down as he flashed by and I knew, if no one else did, what was happening inside that crowded cockpit. White smoke was making a two-foot strip around the oval and I knew that a gloved hand was holding the oil line to the rocker assembly in place.

And I knew that that oil was boiling!

The motor never missed a beat. The white strip mated with the one on the back-stretch, varied not an inch from the previous path around the turn and the checkered flag fell.

The engine died as the flag dropped. The right hand came out of the pit and braked for the far gate. The white Miller slid a little, altered course and coasted silently to the stall.

The kid's face was white and drawn and I saw his right sleeve soaked with oil. They stripped his glove and peeled off the palm of his hand with it. His wrist was hard, glazed and shiny. But his eyes were sparkling.

SO, YOU see what I mean? No? Oh—the finger. Well, when I went into the little brick house with the kid's carburetor I drilled a small hole back of the throttle arm and put in a little spring pin that rode up against the throttle arm plate. You could work the throttle all right until it went wide open. Then the spring popped the pin and the best you could do for shutting it off was quarter closed!

The damn drill slipped when I was holding the piece and it bored a quarter-inch hole right through my middle finger.

The girl? Oh, you mean Peg.

That's really what the story is all about. The kid joined the Air Force three months after that, went out on fighters and turned into one of the hottest P-38 pilots in the South Pacific.

Did he marry the girl before he left, you ask?

No. That's why I say that Adam was a chump. After the kid had been gone a year and Press Relations played him up as head man in the home-town papers, she wrote him that life could never be serene with a guy who was a hero, and she married a drugstore manager!

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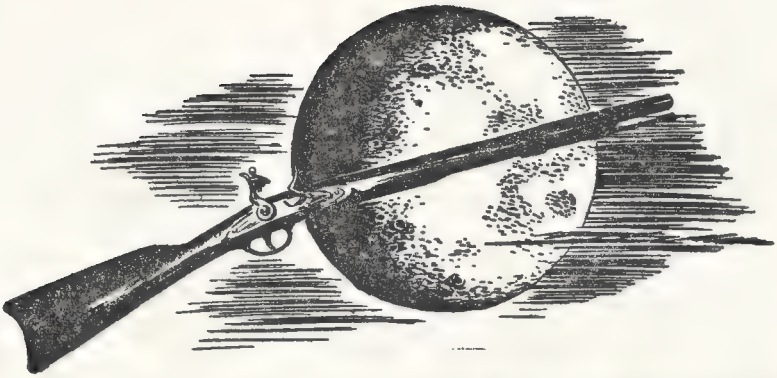


He shifted the sights of his carbine to the low shine of braid along the officer's tunic, and squeezed the trigger.

By T. F. TRACY

HUNTERS' MOON

IT LACKED an hour of sunset, but already there was a stir and bustle of preparations in the bivouac of the Carolina Riflemen at Pine Island. Smoke from the dwindling cook fires blew low in the wind; saddles and gear were laid out in neat rows along the picket lines where tethered horses stamped in the red dust; and little knots of men, their sabers tilted awkwardly across their knees and their powder-horns slung against their buckskin jackets, wrangled cheerfully in low voices beside their piles of stacked carbines.

"It's for the Sawpit Road sure," Corporal Cox said authoritively. "Darcy came in from there last night. He was in the captain's quarters over an hour."

"I heard the same thing," a long, sad-faced trooper drawled. "The Tories have had a foragin' detail up along the Sawpit for four-five days."

A dark man sprawled against a pine bole sat up quickly. "Four-five days," he cut in. "That means beef. My God! What I could do with a hunk of beef!"

"Frenchy," the sad faced man grinned, "all you ever think about is eatin'."

"You mean," said the dark man wryly, "that all I ever do about eatin' is think."

"We'll all eat tomorrow," the corporal said hopefully. "Them Tories will be loaded right down."

Three soft notes, blown not on a trumpet, but on a conch horn, cut across their talk.

"Officers' Call," the corporal said, frowning, "Hell, they had Officers' Call an hour ago."

"That runner, DuBois, came in about fifteen minutes ago," the sad trooper announced mournfully. "That man finds more trouble."

Silently, the troopers turned their heads to watch the three lieutenants of the detachment make their way across the sandy "parade" to the brush hut of the Commanding Officer. They, like the men, were dressed in homespun and leather jackets, only the tarnished gold epaulettes on their buckskin shoulders marking them as officers.

The three lieutenants were followed a moment later by a broad-shouldered, big-boned man whose heavy black eyebrows laid a dark bar across his forehead. He wore the uniform of a regular Continental officer—leather boots, military breeches, and a dark blue officers' tunic.

"That liaison captain don't miss nothin'," Corporal Cox murmured.

"I hear," said the sad-faced trooper dryly, "that they're goin' to issue us all uniforms like that there tomorrow," and a little laugh ran around the group.

IN the low brush hut that served as Headquarters to the bivouac, a burly cavalry captain with a pleasant, ruddy, worried face was sitting at a plank table that held a map and a few hand-drawn sketches, scribbled over with memoranda. One of the fingers of his left hand kept tapping restlessly on the table.

"Sorry, gentlemen," he said shortly as the other officers crowded into the hut. "I'm afraid our little plan for tonight will have to be changed."

They looked at him inquiringly, taking their seats around the plank table.

"I have bad news," he went on soberly. "Major Wilson and Captain Brant, with some of their troops, have been wounded and taken by the Tories. By Major Ferguson's detachment," he added slowly and saw the lieutenants stiffen abruptly.

"By God, Captain, that is bad news," a long-headed senior lieutenant exclaimed. "Is our information reliable?"

Captain Baxter nodded.

"Afraid so," he said, turning to a wiry, leather-faced little man with bright black eyes who was sitting at his right. "DuBois has just come in from Singleton Mills. You tell them, DuBois."

"The Tories have them all right," the little scout said. "They've got them in a big cage on a wagon so they can show them off on the way back to Georgetown."

The senior lieutenant frowned. "How were they taken?"

"Night skirmish at Rugely's Corners. The two officers and about seven troopers all wounded."

"And the detachment?"

"It was pretty badly broken up. About twenty killed or wounded. The others had to pull foot. That Ferguson is a bastard," he added quietly.

"Can we do anything, Captain?" a spare, sandy-haired young lieutenant asked.

"Ferguson's force together with some dragoons are retiring along Ramsay's Pike. How many horses do we have able to make such a march, Lieutenant Scott?"

"Eighty in good condition, sir," the sandy-haired lieutenant said.

Captain Baxter looked at the scout.

"We figure on sixty in Ferguson's detachment," DuBois said.

"How many dragoons?" the senior lieutenant asked seriously.

"About twenty," DuBois said.

"We could do it, sir," the sandy-haired lieutenant cut in. "If that brute of a Ferguson ever gets the major in those dungeons at Georgetown . . ." he paused and pressed his lips tightly together. "Well, everybody knows what kind of a savage Ferguson is."

"If we have eighty horses in condition," Baxter said calmly, "I propose to rescue our men and take Major Ferguson."

The three lieutenants nodded quick approval, but the big liaison officer shifted forward on his bench.

"Allow me to point out, Captain Baxter," he said, "that this detachment is out on a specific mission—to gather supplies for General Marion and the main body at Show Island. I don't believe I have to point out the importance of these supplies. There are over three hundred men in Marion's command now. With the furloughed men coming in from their crop-gathering; there'll soon be over five hundred men. If

that force is not fed it can't be held together. And it's important that it be held together because it's one of the few forces that give us some foothold in this region and it ties up large numbers of British and Tories who might otherwise sweep north against the rear of General Washington's army. Right now it's doubly important. You know that General Greene's army is moving south. A successful southern campagin would go a long way toward bringing this war to an end."

He paused and the four Carolina officers nodded.

"Right, Captain Mayne," Baxter said briefly.

"All right," the Continental captain went on, "General Greene depends on General Marion's command for information about the enemy's movements; he depends on Marion to make important diversions of enemy strength; and he depends on Marion to cover his left flank. The success of the whole southern campaign depends on how well Marion's force will be able to fulfill these assignments, and Marion's effectiveness rests on his supplies. You can't hold a volunteer force together unless you feed them. Therefore, I feel, Captain Baxter, that this detachment should carry out its mission and raid the supply train on the Sawpit Road."

"Captain Mayne," Baxter said softly, "the Tories are carrying off two of our best and most popular officers and seven of our troopers."

"That's unfortunate," the Continental captain said. "If the situation permitted, I'd be in favor of this rescue party, but the supplies that will enable General Marion to carry out his assigned role in the southern campaign are more important than a dozen, or even a hundred, of our troops. You can't hold these irregulars together unless you feed them."

"It takes more than just food to hold irregulars together," Baxter said. "It takes, above all else, mutual confidence between all ranks. If we deliberately allow the Tories to carry off our regimental comrades it will break up our force faster than short rations will. In this kind of warfare we cannot let a comrade down while there is any possibility of helping him."

"Neither," said the Continental captain a little sharply, "can we let the campaign in the south down in order to save a few men."

"I am not proposing that we let the southern campaign down. I am merely considering what course of action will be most helpful to it."

"Your primary assignment is to get rations," the Continental said. "The troops haven't had any meat for ten days. The rice supplies are down to one week's ration. The corn will last maybe ten days, the sweet potatoes maybe twelve. I'm convinced that General Marion would order you to go on with the attack on the supply train tonight if he were aware of the situation."

"I'm afraid, Captain Mayne," Baxter said heavily, "that you aren't considering the local conditions in South Carolina. Every Redcoat victory, no matter how small, helps discourage our people. If we allow them to drag Major Wilson and his men all along the Georgetown road it would be a major defeat for us. If we rescue those men it will be a sharp defeat for them and our people will be encouraged."

"The major military picture is more important right now, Captain Baxter, than any local consideration."

"These local considerations," Baxter said tightly, "may have a decisive result on military operations."

He leaned forward, both his hands on the map, feeling the sudden weight of his responsibilities press like a physical burden on his shoulders. Whichever choice he made might turn out to be the wrong one, and could be very serious. To let the Tories drag Wilson and his men to Georgetown might give a decisive blow to Patriot morale, already shaken by too many defeats. Not to secure the supply train might weaken Marion's forces. He pressed his lips tightly together, thinking of the almost empty supply bins at Snow Island, of Wilson and his wounded men caged like animals for the Tories to laugh at all along the Georgetown road.

He stood up abruptly.

"We will attack Major Ferguson's detachment," he said.

His three lieutenants rose quickly.

"Yes, sir."

"I would like to point out, Captain Baxter," the Continental captain said slowly, "that you run a serious danger in attacking an armed detachment of such strength. The forage detail on the Sawpit has only forty guards."

"I've thought of all that," Baxter said quietly. "We will attack Major Ferguson."

"I shall have to report, sir, that in my opinion, you deliberately evaded your instructions," the Continental captain said.

"You say we have eighty horses fit for this march, Lieutenant Scott?" Baxter asked turning to his lieutenant.

"Yes, sir."

Baxter nodded at his officers.

"We will choose four sections of twenty men each. The remaining troops will guard camp. We start in ten minutes."

The lieutenants saluted. "Very well, sir."

Captain Baxter turned to his orderly.

"Bring my horse, Davis."

AT twilight, the command, strung out in a column of twos, moved out of a pine barren onto a narrow wood road, and went up through scattered live oak and laurel bush, the horses' hooves making a soft *chuff chuff* on the sod of the overgrown trail.

"Have we time, DuBois?" Baxter asked.

"Time, yes, but not to waste."

DuBois had dropped back from the carefully strung-out advance guard with a suggestion for a slight change of route and now rode at the captain's side, his lively black eyes moving restlessly along the side of the trail.

"Are there other enemy parties out, DuBois?"

The little scout shrugged his shoulders. "We have no reports on any."

"How do you feel about this attack, DuBois?"

"If we figured everything right, Captain, it ought to work. If we made mistakes, we can find plenty of trouble. We can't be sure."

Baxter nodded soberly, his solid pleasant face made grave by his thoughts. The little scout's words had summed up his own anxiety and kept running through his mind.

"We can't be sure." That was the rub. You made your plans on the best information you could get, and you figured out every move. But you couldn't be sure. . . . On the chance that he was right, he had to risk the lives of all the men in the column behind him in order to carry out what seemed to him the important mission. But it was always possible that there was some slip-up in any plan. That was the one point that worried him. The Patriot morale in Carolina rested not only on this attack but on a successful attack. And on that morale, he was convinced, the final success of Greene's southern campaign really rested.

He frowned somberly, a deep pucker wrinkling the skin between his eyes. Now that he had committed his troops to this action he felt keyed up and restless.

"We can't afford to muff this," he said.

DuBois turned his head. "Right, Captain," he said. "This is one of those little battles that decide how the big battles are going to turn out later on."

Captain Baxter straightened his shoulders as though he were trying to throw off a physical burden, and looked back along the line. In the deepening dark only the first half-dozen files were clearly visible. Behind those first solid files, there were dim gray shapes that shifted along the road, the pale hat plumes that marked them as Patriot soldiers bobbing like huge moths in the fading gray light.

They rode easily, these Carolina frontiersmen, swinging loose and alert in the saddle, their guns slung on their backs, all equipment tied down so that the only sound along the column was the faint creak of saddles, an occasional murmur of words as men spoke to their file mates, or the click of a horse's hoof against a stone.

"We make the turn through Colton's Woods shortly, Captain," DuBois said. "Think I'll go up front."

"Good," Baxter agreed.

The scout cantered away along the trail and the Continental liaison captain who was riding a few paces back tapped his horse with his heel, moving up beside Baxter.

"Isn't it going to be rather dark, Captain Baxter?" he asked in a dry casual tone.

"Moon will be up at ten, Captain Mayne," Baxter said quietly. "Plenty of light."

The liaison captain rode silently along on his left. Baxter could feel his opposition and a little flare of resentment came into his mind.

"It's easy for him to be cocksure," he thought bitterly. "He's not responsible for the command. He's right about the food being low, but this comes before food bins."

He shook his head slowly from side to side as though to shake off a troublesome thought. Even now with the decision made and the troop in motion, the memory of those scanty food bins came back to bother him. His primary mission was, as Captain Mayne had kept pointing out, to secure supplies. But General Marion had given him discretionary powers to hit the enemy at any good opportunity. This was a double-barreled opportunity. Still it had been a hard decision to make. The thought of the Tory provision train with its scanty guard had been a temptation. Not only was it a chance at easy victory, but the thought of full rations was itself very tempting to active men who had been on short rations for days. His whole command, officers and men alike, talked interminably about food, and at any hour of the day or night he had heard words like "barbecued beef," "juicy pork roast," "venison pot pie," drifting along the company street.

His own favorite obsession was ham. He talked about ham, he thought about ham. He even dreamed about ham. Sometimes it was ham and eggs, sometimes it was ham roasted with yams and brown sugar, but mostly it was just thick slabs of ham grilled on a stick over a campfire and eaten with hot corn bread.

He jerked himself up and shook his head. He had chosen the hardest task and he was sure he was right. But still the thought of the food bins worried him, and as he pushed his hat back on his head he felt the edge of the October wind cool against the sweat on his forehead.

JUST short of ten o'clock the column turned off a dusty by-way and cut across country, skirting a swamp where tall cypress peaked against a dim shine of stars. The advance guard had halted for a breather just beyond the swamp, and the little scout made his way back to the column.

"We made good time, Captain."

Captain Baxter nodded.

"Better than I expected. About three miles to Ramsay's Pike, isn't it?"

"Right," the scout said again. "And there's your light!"

For some time, as the troop swung along the dusty by-road, Baxter had been conscious of the yellow stain deepening in the eastern sky. Now as they came clear of the cypress, he caught his first glimpse of the big apricot-colored moon.

"Hunters' moon," one of the troopers just behind him drawled softly.

"The Pike makes a pretty sharp bend there, doesn't it, DuBois?" Baxter asked.

"Sharp enough, Captain," DuBois said. "We'll have time to cut out their scout. Then we ought to be able to catch the main body flat-footed right on a stretch of open road."

A faint smile relaxed the corners of Baxter's mouth. Men like DuBois, he told himself, smiling, might have trouble defining the word "tactics," but they knew how to apply them.

The troop moved steadily up-slope through scattered pine woods, the horses' hooves kicking up a thin bitter dust that smelled of pine mold and dried rosin. The sound of hooves was completely muffled by the thick pine needles and the troop began to hear the little noises of the night—the hoot of a startled owl in the timber, the yapping of a distant fox, the sustained keen murmur of the fall wind coasting through the pitch pines.

"Close up. Close up!" the officers called in low voices.

They came up to the crest and dropped downhill, coming into the bright moonlight for a little while as their horses' hooves clattered on the rocks of Burdell's Creek, and the troopers saw the low bulk of Hickory Ridge wedged against the stars.

"Take it easy," Baxter warned, and the word of command ran like a sigh back along the column: "Easy . . . easy."

There was brush on this hill, clumps and patches of hazel bush and laurel scattered among fading hickory trees, and the troop twisted its way up-hill, snaking in and out between the timber, the harsh smell of dying leaves coming up to them on the night's coolness.

"Quiet," Baxter said, but it was a warning more than a command. The jokes and drawled banter of the first part of the march had died out completely and the men rode silently, each man seeming to sit a little straighter in his saddle as they neared the point of attack. The strong moonlight brought out the faint shine of sweat along the slant of their jaws, and the set of their faces, composed and hard, under the drooping cloth hat brims.

A part of this ridge had been cleared by an old fire and, as the troopers skirted the clearing, they could look down-slope to their left at the almost level stretch of land running up toward Burdell's Crossroads. Across this flat land rows of peaked corn shocks made long diagonals, and straight across its center a section of Ramsay's Pike made a pale streak in the moonlight. At the far edge of the clearing the horses of the advance point were standing under the trees. DuBois came out of the timber on foot.

"All clear, Captain. Bledsoe is down there on the lookout."

Baxter nodded. "Good. Can you and Bledsoe handle their point riders?"

"Better give us four or five men to make sure. We'll take to the brush on the curve after we fix the point. We can fire straight down the road."

"All right. Lieutenant Scott's section will be on the curve. Get what men you need."

He swung his hand straight up above his head.

"Halt!"

The column halted in the fringe of timber and Baxter spoke to the guide sergeant behind him.

"Officers and section sergeants, front!"

As the section leaders came forward, he pointed down-hill.

"I want you section leaders to have a look at the terrain. Follow me."

Within two hundred yards the timber ended in a ragged outline. Between the timber and the Pike stretched another fifty yards of almost level land heavily spotted with brush. A dry creek bed cut along this bushy land roughly paralleling the Pike. Across the Pike was the stretch of flat cornfield with a few shocks standing in one corner.

"We're about fifty yards below the curve here," Baxter said, pointing with his right hand, and his section leaders nodded, looking at the space of sharply curving road that cut around a spur of the hill.

"Lieutenant Scott, you will post your men on that spur. Put your men with the fowling pieces close to the road."

"Understood, Captain."

"I'll take the section immediately on your left, my left extending to about where we're sanding. Lieutenant Sevier, you'll take the third section extending from here about down to that dead tree. Lieutenant Marshall will post his section on your left. His task is to clean up the rear guard and then move in. Lieutenant Sevier, you will beat down any opposition from the wagons and then shift your fire wherever needed. I'm concentrating most of our weight on the right end of our line because the main convoy guard will be right against the curve. The men with the fowling pieces will be posted along that creek. Understood?"

The section leaders nodded.

"Riflemen are to be posted along timber edge, Captain?"

"Right."

"And the assembly point?"

"About the horses, Captain?"

He answered their questions briefly as they strode up the hill.

"Get your sections into position. See that all extra guns are taken to the firing line."

Leaving their horses out of sight in the timber, the sections moved to their allotted places, the carbine men, each carrying an extra double-barreled fowling piece, sliding into the brush along the creek bottom, the long rifle men blotting themselves among the trees.

"Do all fowling pieces have extra charges?" Baxter asked.

"Yes, sir."

"All right. Everybody check their primings."

"They're being checked, sir."

Captain Mayne came up to Baxter's station, a carbine hung hunter-fashion under his arm.

"You work pretty close, don't you?"

"Yes," Baxter said, "we do."

"I hope," said Mayne, "that after all this effort we're at the right place."

Baxter held up his hand. "Listen!"

From the west where the road cut into timber a faint rocking sound blew down on the gusts of wind.

"Wagons," Baxter said, and at the same time the low warning hoot of an owl drifted up from the creek bottom on the left.

Baxter turned to his trumpeter who stood leaning against a tree beside him. "Answer, Fenton."

The stocky young trooper took a deep breath and threw back his head. The low throaty call of a hunting owl ran out along the dark timber.

"Stay by me, Fenton," Baxter said.

THE enemy column was a dark shifting line along the moonlit road, the creak and rattle of loaded wagons, running on across the flat cornfields. Two point riders rode well in advance, slouching at ease in their saddles, carbines balanced across pommels, the metallic jingle of their equipment coming up clearly to the men at the edge of the woods.

Captain Mayne touched Baxter's arm.

"That's no irregular cavalry," he said sharply. "Those are British Dragoons, and I'd say there were plenty of them."

He pointed at the main body.

"I see them," Baxter said. "Dragoons all right."

He was running his eyes along the column estimating its number. It was stronger than they had figured on, as strong as his own command, and at least half of the main body were dragoons, big solid men, who rode their horses with the ease of veterans, their files tight and orderly even on this night march, the moonlight glinting along the metal of their wicked Jäger carbines.

Captain Mayne shook his head.

"You can't tackle that bunch, Captain Baxter. Your men haven't the training to stand against dragoons."

Baxter shifted his glance steadily down the enemy column.

"More wagons than we figured on, too," he told himself and presesd his lips together tightly as he saw the high framework of the cage topping one of the middle wagons. He had figured on a brisk skirmish. Now he knew they were in for a fight.

"You'd better send out the 'no attack' signal, Captain," the tall Continental officer said urgently. "The point is on the curve."

The two point riders, now riding one behind the other, were approaching the sharp angle of the curve, their horses' hooves kicking up little spurts of dust that hung over the road.

"My men are not Maryland Militia," Baxter said shortly. "Take your post, Captain."

The point riders went on around the curve and the column of dragoons came on abreast of Baxter's command. A tall dragoon officer rode at the head of the column beside the guide sergeant. The gold braid on his dragoon's tunic flashed softly in the moonlight as he swung easily in his saddle.

"When he gets to that bush," Baxter decided, picking a scrubby bush in line with the bight of the curve. He pushed his carbine slowly across a low branch and held the butt solidly against his shoulder.

"About three more seconds," he decided, and counted them carefully to himself: "one . . . two . . ."

He shifted the sights of his carbine to the low shine of braid along the officer's tunic.

"Three." He squeezed the trigger.

A yellow gun flash lit up the tops of the hazel brush under his carbine muzzle. The tall officer stiffened abruptly in his saddle and sagged slowly over toward the horn.

"Fire!" Baxter yelled and saw the dark line of horsemen stagger as the blasts of overcharged buckshot ripped through their column.

"Pull foot!" someone yelled from the wagons, "It's Marion!"

Horses shied and plunged along the crowded roadway. Men swore in startled voices, and clouds of dust boiled up like smoke in the moonlight.

A metallic command rode hard above the confusion. "Twos right!"

"Fire!" Baxter said automatically as a second burst of gunfire slammed along the creek bottom. Men and horses were down on the road, and riderless mounts bucked frantically out of line, empty stirrup cups banging against their sides.

"Fire!" Baxter yelled again, tamping his own rifle ball firm against the powder charge.

All down the line he could hear the heavy jar

of the fowling pieces and then the sharper crack of the long rifles taking up the fire.

The men were firing methodically by number so that now from one part of the double line, now from another, little volleys of gunfire kept lashing out at the dragoons.

"Dismount!" the metallic voice on the road shouted. "Fight on foot."

"A good officer that," Baxter thought with quick admiration and, pushing his loaded carbine over the tree branch, looked professionally down the milling enemy column for a chance to eliminate him. But the hard-voiced officer was out of sight, his staccato command riding the confusion.

"Down there on the right, and commence firing!"

"Miller, get those damned horses off the road!"

"Corporal Starr, bring your squad up here!"

Horse holders were already getting knots of horses off the road at the jump, and from here and there where dead animals made a little cover on the lead-scoured roadway, the Jäger carbines were beginning to blink. Small branches and pieces of bark snapped up along the edge of the woods.

"Keep cover, there, Fenton," Baxter snapped at his over-eager trumpeter, and stepped forward himself for a better look. A ricochet pinged on a stone and went rocketing off through the leaves.

From the right flank, Lieutenant Scott's voice came, harsh and eager above the slam of gunfire. "Get those damned Redcoats crawling up the roadway."

Baxter ran his glance along the road, but failed to make out the crawling men. Dust and powder smoke made a shifting haze over the road where the carbine muzzles bloomed low down in dirty yellow flashes.

A clutter of Redcoats bobbed up suddenly about the first wagon in the train.

"Cut those horses loose!" It was the metal-lunged British officer again, and Baxter caught a flash of epaulettes around the end of the tarpaulin-covered wagon, as the horses were lockeyed clear of the wagon tongue.

"Heave!" said the metallic voice, and Baxter saw the first wagon tilt crazily before his eyes, the tarpualin making a widening stain in the moonlight as the wagon canted up. The wagon crashed over on its side, the tarpaulin ripped loose some of its chords, and a few heavy sacks rolled out on the road.

Almost immediately, carbines began to wink from behind the upturned wagon.

"Corporal Egan," the metallic voice commanded, "get your men up here! Kick up that dust, everybody."

"Looks like they're going to fort up behind those wagons, Captain," the trumpeter said.

"I see," Baxter said and looked hastily down to the end of the convoy. Most of the rear guard had broken after the first volleys and no more than a dozen carbines were firing back from the last wagons.

"Fenton," Baxter said urgently, "get down to Lieutenant Marshall. Tell him to assemble twelve mounted men with fowling pieces behind me. Tell Lieutenant Sevier to report with eight of his men mounted. Make it fast!"

The trumpeter left on the run and Baxter stepped forward into the clear.

"Second Section!" he shouted. "Keep those damned Redcoats away from the wagons!"

He steadied his own carbine on a tree, caught a flash of a red coat through the dust, and fired.

The dust swirling up in purposeful clouds made a screen over the right of the dragoon line, countering the deadly aimed fire of the long riflemen which was the key of the militia attack.

It was, Baxter knew suddenly, a tight moment. The coolness and skill of the dragoon officer was changing the picture. If the dragoons succeeded in forting up behind loaded wagons the raid would fail. Everything depended now on a quick shift of attack.

HE heard horses moving up in the the woods behind him and turned around.

"Sergeant Ames," he called, "take charge here," and went lunging off to the assembly point.

"Come on, Fenton," he called to his returning trumpeter. "They'll need you."

"Sevier," he called ahead to the moving horsemen.

"Here, Captain."

"Those damned dragoons are raising dust to throw our rifles off. They're trying to fort up behind those wagons."

"I see them, Captain."

"If dust keeps us from seeing, it keeps them from seeing, too. I want you to give them a shot charge from around that spur. Are Marshall's men with you?"

"Yes, sir. I've twenty men all told."

"Good. Get ten more from Scott, or whatever number he can spare you. And make it fast. We've got to keep them from the wagons."

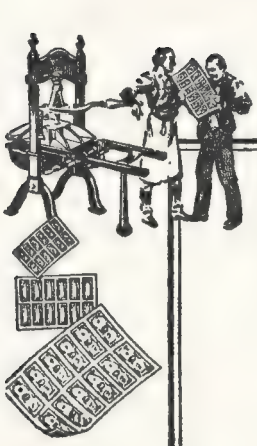
"Very well," Sevier said and turned in his saddle.

"Forward!" he yelled, and the command whirled off at a sharp run among the trees.

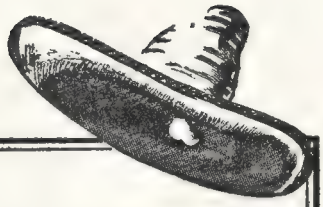
Anxiety furrowed a deep crease between Baxter's eyebrows as he took up his post. The whole forward stretch of roadway was a roil of smoke and dust slatted with yellowish streaks of carbine fire.

"Fire on the second wagon!" he shouted, conscious even as he spoke that Redcoats were already clustering behind the dust-shattered tarpaulin.

(Continued on page 144)



DECORATION BY ROGER THOMAS



PRINTING-PRESS MONEY

A Fact Story

By R. HAVELOCK-BAILIE

WHILE Francisco Villa is looked upon by most people as having been a bandit, history will prove him something else. Evidence of this may be found in the fact that more than fifty thousand Mexican citizens, many of them high in civil life, boast today of having served under the great revolutionary general. And it is a matter of historical fact that General Villa commanded the largest army ever to engage in actual warfare on the North American continent, aside from the Confederate and Union forces of our own Civil War.

General Villa had to have money to pay these men; money to feed them; money to clothe and to arm them. Some of the rich, believing in Villa, contributed millions of golden pesos and herds of cattle to the cause. Certain other pesos and cattle were confiscated. But it takes much money to keep an army of fifty-five thousand men in the field. General Villa did what many before and after him have done.

After all, he controlled much of Mexico and, since money is only printed paper, why not print his own? This he ordered done. He caused thousands to look upon that money exactly as they looked upon money backed by the Federal Government; or, not looking upon it so, to pretend to for the good of their health.

In almost any town in Northern Mexico, the money of Villa was coin of the realm, but along the Border this was not so. Particularly in Ciudad Juarez, for the people of that city bought their supples in El Paso, Texas, and to the people of El Paso, General Francisco Villa was only Pancho Villa, the bandit.

General Villa's money was printed at Dallas, Texas. Each time more money was needed a detachment of soldiers was sent to Dallas, carrying gold to pay for the printing. While the actual printing was in progress, these soldiers guarded the shop doors.

The reason? There was much money, millions of pesos, within. It was good money of

the government of General Francisco Villa, whether backed by the Mexican Government or not.

When the printing was finished, soldiers solemnly guarded it every foot of the way to El Paso, and at Ciudad Juarez a company of revolutionary troops met them and escorted the "treasure" to the main body of the army. It was a serious matter.

WE were paid off every month. Each officer, each man, received his pay in the money of Villa, down to the last cent; and the rate of pay was consistent with average army pay in Mexico.

On this occasion the men sent to escort the money from Juarez made good time. We had two days of hot and tiresome waiting there. Cantinas were busy serving rich Chihuahuans and Americans from across the Rio Grande. We could smell and almost taste that cool beer but we could not buy it with the money of Villa.

So our throats were dry and our bellies empty, for we had been ordered to be orderly and an order from Villa was an order to be obeyed.

Leo said, "I'd give my right arm for a tablecloth dinner."

"You and me both," I said. "But what the hell—"

"This stuff looks like money and feels like money but it sure don't put anything in a man's stomach up here," he said.

We walked around, kicking up dust, and once in a while some friendly bartender gave us a glass of beer. But the little beer we got that way didn't even clean the dust from our whistles and finally Leo said, "I'm going to have a tablecloth dinner and ten bottles of beer if they take my stripes for it."

At the moment it seemed that such a set-up was worth even the wrath of Villa, so I said, "Brother, you anticipated me."

We went to the best restaurant on the street and it was mighty fine sitting there with well-dressed people about us.

We ate everything on the menu and for the first time in my life I gave thought to the cubic capacity of the human body, particularly as regards liquids. Our dust-coated systems absorbed it and I felt at peace with the world and considerably stuffed when I called for the bill. It was big but not too big, if we'd had any gold or American currency. But . . .

I pulled out a roll and peeled off a fifty-peso note, *monedad revolucionario*. Our waiter's eyes flicked at the note and then at us. We bristled about equally with whiskers and guns, so he walked over to the manager without saying a word—to us.

We sat there, unconcernedly drinking the last of our beer, but we were not unconcerned. Leo was closer to them than I was, and watched them openly. I did not, but from the corner of my eye I saw a big chap walk over to them and a few minutes later the waiter was at my elbow counting out the change in silver coin! I picked up these coins as if they were hot, and we were courteously bowed out of the restaurant to the street.

I was blanked.

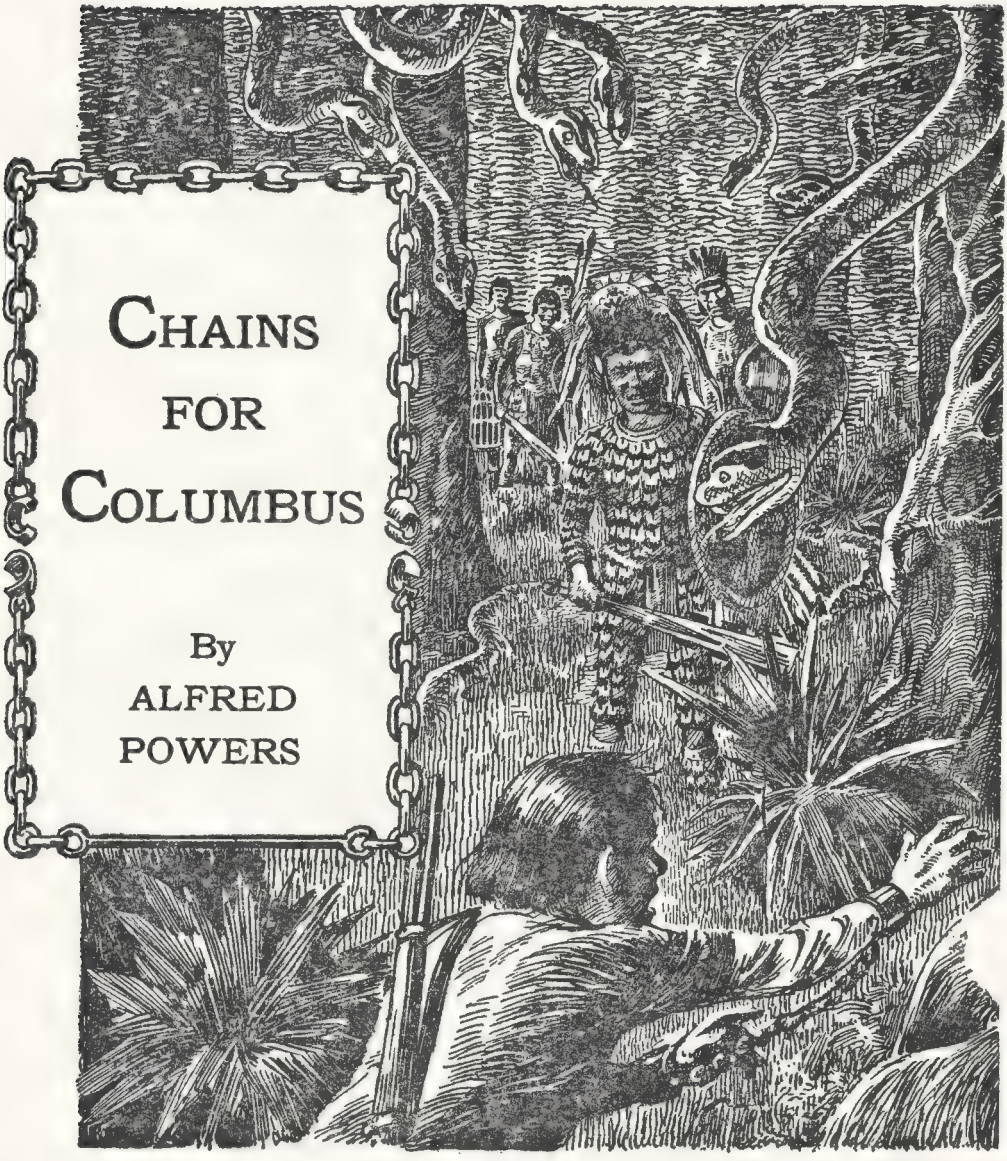
"What the hell!" I said. "When I was studying economics and stuff they were always trying to tell me something about money. I could never get it straight. I guess all there is to it is that a chap says I'm the law or whatnot, buys a press and starts printing and pretty quick everybody says that's money and it is."

"Is that a fact?" Leo said. "Listen, just as plenty trouble was getting ready to happen to you and me a guy walks over and asks the manager the size of that note you gave him. He finds out and hands the manager a fifty-peso piece, *oro nacional*—gold, fellow. Then he took the fifty-peso note from the manager and sticks it in his pocket. That's why you've got *plata* in your pocket instead of a knot on the top of your head."

"What's the matter with that guy—he crazy?" I asked.

"Could be," Leo said. "Also it could be he's a man who wants to prove something—maybe to himself. That man was General Francisco Villa."

Statement of the ownership, management, circulation, etc., required by the Acts of Congress of August 24, 1912, and March 3, 1933, of Adventure, published monthly at Chicago, Illinois, for October 1, 1945. State of New York, county of New York, ss. Before me a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Harold S. Goldsmith, who having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of Adventure, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, Popular Publications, Inc., 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y. Editor, Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd Street 17, New York, N. Y. Managing Editor, none. Business Manager, Harold S. Goldsmith, 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y. 2. That the owner is: Popular Publications, Inc., 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y.; Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y., Harold S. Goldsmith, 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y. 3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: none. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner, and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest, direct or indirect, in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. Harold S. Goldsmith, Business Manager. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 22nd day of October 1945. Eva M. Walker, Notary Public, New York County Clerk's No. 16, Register's No. 363-W-6. (My commission expires March 30, 1946.) [Seal]—Form 3526—Ed. 1933.



CHAINS FOR COLUMBUS

By ALFRED POWERS

THE STORY THUS FAR:

IT IS the year 1500 and COLUMBUS, the great Admiral of the Ocean Sea, idol of the populace but victim of the jealousy of FONSECA and other court officials, is being returned to Spain fettered like a common felon to stand charges of treason. Young FRANCISCO PEREZ, the narrator of the story, and his friends CORTES and GOMEZ, nicknamed "Pieces-of-Eight," make the mistake of firing a salute to the returning navigator and Francisco finds himself, along with PICO, Columbus' cannoneer, in the toils of the Inquisition. They have been caught by Fonseca's agents while attempting to deliver a letter from Columbus to his sponsor QUEEN ISABELLA. The fact that Pico's parrot, imported from the New World, keeps repeating the cryptic words, *Lord, my lord, my great lord Montezuma,* is taken as an indication that Columbus has forsaken allegiance to his king and faith and accepted some strange new god and master.

ZORILLA, the Inquisition's Cadiz torturer,

ILLUSTRATED BY L. STERNE STEVENS

The advance part of the troop came into view, marching along the trail in single file. The sorrel snorted and reared and then the leader came toward me at a run between the weaving serpent heads, ignoring the menace of the boas.

seeks unavailingly to obtain evidence against Columbus and admissions of guilt from Francisco and Pico, both of whom are removed by the dread tribunal to Seville to be executed by the *auto-da-fé*. They escape the death by fire, however, when the judge, about to pronounce sentence, is stricken by the plague. They manage to rejoin Cortes and Pieces-of-Eight who tell them they have managed to deliver Columbus' secret letter to the queen and that the admiral is now free. They join Columbus and accompany him to Granada to plead his cause before Ferdinand and Isabella. There in the great Alhambra Palace, Columbus exhibits his chains—the fetters have become a symbol to him of the nation's ingratitude and he vows always to carry them with him—and wins permission from the queen to make a fourth voyage of discovery. Fonseca, however, wins the king's ear and poisons his mind against the project. Francisco overhears them plotting to discredit Columbus and reports to the admiral what he has heard. Because, as a boy, Francisco has worked in the gun powder factory of BERNARDO CRUZ, Columbus signs Francisco up for the voyage and delegates him to purchase the necessary powder and ordnance for the expedition. One of his old co-workers, EMILIO, is also signed on the ship's roll. It is difficult to find satisfactory crews so Columbus is forced to accept the dregs of the waterfront. He signs on one CARLOS ROBLES, without investigating his background, and when the fleet is ready to sail Francisco and Pico see the man for the first time. He is Zorilla, the Cadiz torturer, obviously aboard to act as a spy for Fonseca and the king.

Disregarding all warnings as to the man's evil character Columbus permits Zorilla to sail. On the voyage one of the ships becomes disabled and the Admiral is forced to put in to the harbor of Santo Domingo, a port forbidden him by the king. OVANDO, the governor, forbids him haven there and orders him to sea again. Columbus, in turn, warns the governor of a hurricane coming up and begs Ovando to delay the homeward voyage of the treasure fleet till it has blown over but the stubborn official pays no attention and the fleet sails, and thirty-two ships are lost. Only Columbus' vessels are saved.

Mutiny, fomented by Zorilla, occurs on his own ship and with the admiral sick the captain takes command, quells the uprising and executes the malcontents by making them walk the plank, Zorilla shackled with Columbus' own chains. The Cadiz torturer, however, is picked up by Mosquito Coast Indians before he drowns. The vessels put into a harbor near a settlement of savages to take on water and the Indians, at first friendly, are finally goaded by the Spaniards' lust for gold to attack them. Cannon and gunpowder have been brought

ashore for defense purposes and for a while the Indians are held off but finally they force the Spaniards to sail away. Francisco, separated from his fellows in the melée, is marooned alone on the hostile and unexplored shore with the two horses which had come on the voyage, two cannon, some matchlocks and a few kegs of gunpowder.

He starts out on a lonely trek along the coast, hoping to signal a friendly sail some day. Driving through the jungle a Spanish voice hails him. It is Zorilla, still wearing Columbus' chains. By a trick the evil man from Cadiz gets Francisco to unlock his fetters and promptly claps them on the young man instead. Indians accept Zorilla as a white god and assume Francisco is his slave. They wind their way through the jungle and come at last to an ancient, uninhabited city built around great pyramids.

Zorilla unlocks one of Francisco's leg-irons to permit him to climb the pyramid and the youth runs away, manages to train one of the cannon on his nemesis. Zorilla climbs out of range and it is a stalemate. Francisco can't chase him with the cannon—Zorilla can't descend the pyramid without being shot!

PART IV

CURIOUSLY now, with neither having the upper hand, we both seemed to be worse off than if one were in control and able to enforce obedience from the other. Zorilla could stay where he was on the summit of the pyramid, or he could descend on the other side and remain hidden and wait for his chance to ambush me. I, on the other hand, would have to stay awake day and night until I could no longer do so. Sooner or later, with heavy slumber possessing me, I would have the chains snapped shut upon my left ankle, and wake up to find myself Zorilla's slave again.

I thought of the natives—why not go out to them and convince them that I was the white god and Zorilla the slave? Yet, as long as Zorilla stayed inside the city walls, it would be impossible to get the Yucatans to trespass upon these forbidden and mysteriously sacred precincts to assist me to capture him. Was it the great snake that kept them out? Whatever it was, they offered but a slim hope. Still, it was my only chance to end this terrible vigilance. So I went along the pavement, leading both horses, out the gate by which we had entered.

The natives had retired to their village, but I yelled at the top of my voice until a messenger arrived from there. I made signs to him that I wanted the rest to come, and when they all had arrived, I indicated they were to kneel down and worship me as they had worshiped Zorilla. They shook their heads no, and jabbered among themselves, with an outlandish amount of gesticulating.

I kept motioning them to acknowledge me as the white god. Then, suddenly, there was Zorilla with his matchlock.

He kept me covered with the gun. Though it was awkward and difficult, he contrived at the same time to put his finger to his forehead and then point it at me. The Yucatans, understanding from this that I had gone mad, surrounded me and took hold of me and held me until Zorilla came up and snapped the chains shut around my left ankle. As he straightened up from doing this, he slapped me on the right jaw and then, as I reeled, slapped me on the left.

He signaled the natives to an act of worship and simultaneously they went to their knees. I remained standing.

"I will give you one minute," said Zorilla.

There was naught else for me to do. I kneeled down there among those abject and superstitious natives.

CHAPTER XVII

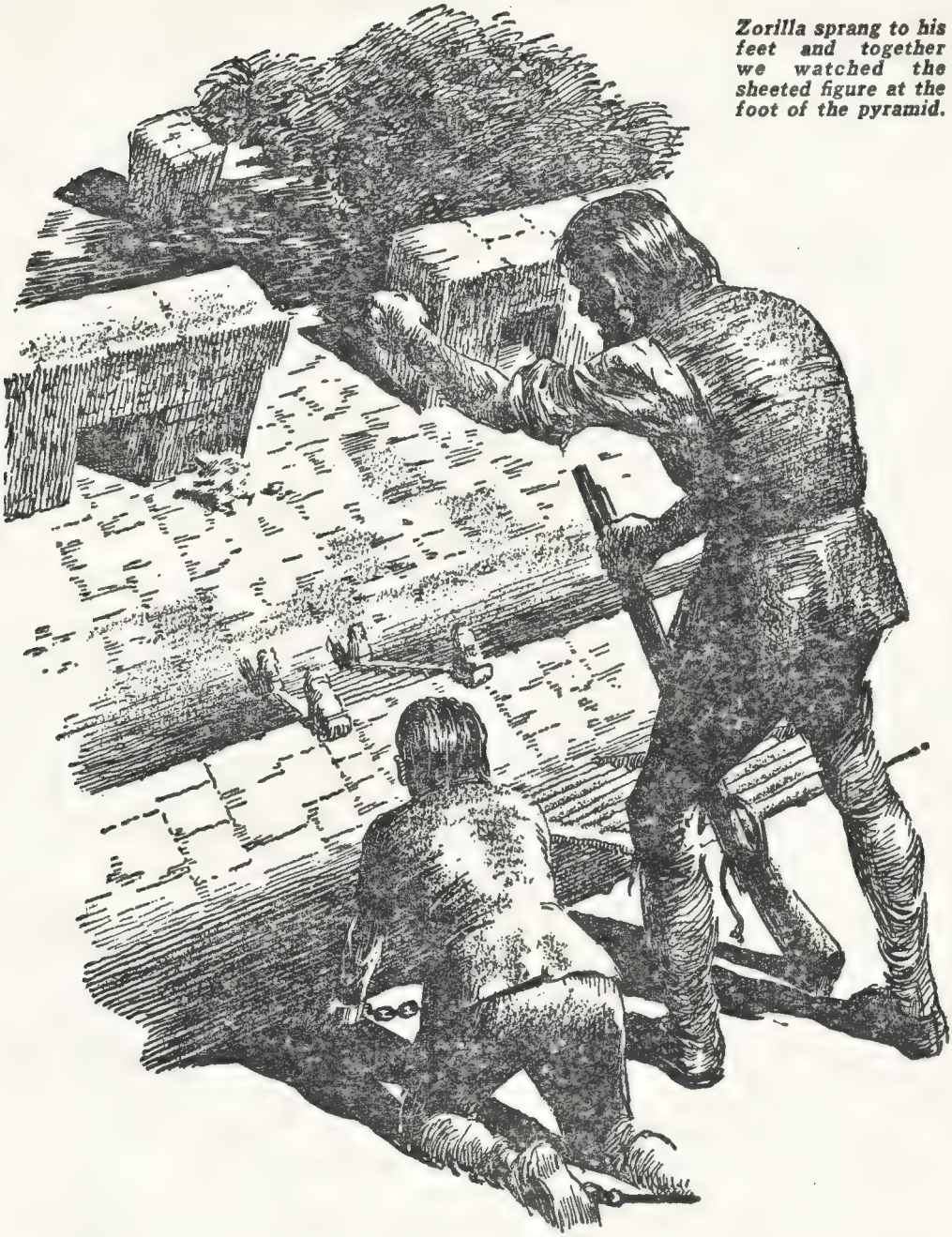
THE SPANISH GHOST

BEFORE sunset, Zorilla unloaded the horses and tethered them out where they could graze among the ruins. Then he considered where we ourselves would spend the night. This was not easy to decide, albeit in this city a thousand rooms lay empty and ready for us to choose from, without our having to pay so much as a *marevidi* for elaborate apartments in which kings might have slept.

"Let's put down our beds in the open," I advised.

"But the snakes!" he objected.

Besides the boa constrictor to make him nervous and afraid, there had been stone reptile carvings everywhere we turned. One building, which we called *El Templo de Serpientes,* had its front engraved all over with the folds of two mighty snakes, their endless entwining bodies making the border for panel after panel. Another structure contained eight bars above each door, like the rungs of a ladder or the slats of a lattice, longer from bottom to top and tipped with serpents' heads. The balustrades of a great stairway terminated in boa heads six cubits long, with open jaws where I could have found shelter from a shower. One serpent had a man's face, several held people's heads in their distended jaws, and a scaly body connected two human wrists much the same as mine were connected by the chain. The cup we used for drinking water was one we had picked up here—a black volcanic stone carved as a coiled serpent, the bowl formed inside the



Zorilla sprang to his feet and together we watched the sheeted figure at the foot of the pyramid.

coils and the protruding head serving as a handle.

"Snakes could be in the rooms as well as out here," I answered. "Wherever the doors have been closed to keep them out we can't get in, and the open doors can't be shut to prevent them from crawling in while we are asleep. The buildings have settled, and all the doors are jammed or sag and don't fit anymore. You can go in and pick out a room if you want to. I feel safer out here."

"We'll go to the top of the pyramid and sleep there," declared Zorilla. "That's the safest place I can think of."

He made me hold out my shackled hands, palms upward, in a beseeching gesture, and

piled the skin blankets on my arms. He picked up both matchlocks so he would have two quick shots in case of need during the night. I had over my shoulders the two pouches of ready-mixed gunpowder I regularly carried.

At the base of the pyramid I said to him: "Zorilla, you will have to loosen one foot again or I can't get up."

"No," he declared.

"The steps are a cubit high. The chain won't let me reach them."

"Throw down the skins," he ordered.

He laid the two matchlocks on top of them, picked me up in his powerful arms, threw me over his shoulder as if I were a log, and carried me to the summit. My face was downward and I amused myself by counting the steps. There were seventy of them. So I judged the pyramid was about a hundred feet high.

Zorilla went back down and returned with the skins and matchlocks at a single load.

In the absence of fuel on the top, and the labor of getting a supply up, we went without a fire. We did not need it for heat, because the night was warm and pleasant, or for light, because the moon was big and close and luminous, its softness casting a spell over the forsaken city.

At first I lay down and hoped and expected I would soon drop off to sleep, for this in truth seemed a secure place up here and I felt no need of vigilance. But there was no heaviness in my eyelids and none came there. I remained wide awake, gazing up at the clear sky, making pictures out of the shadow upon the moon, and counting stars until they wouldn't stay counted.

Zorilla slept. I raised myself upon my elbow and looked at his face. Sleep and the moon did an amazing thing in erasing the cruelty.

I lay down flat again but in a few minutes I sat up with a jump, for I had heard something. Then I stood up. At the western entrance, which was not far off from the pyramid, I saw a white-robed figure go along the pavement toward the gateway and through it. He stopped to pick up food that had been left for him there the same as it had been left for us at the south entrance.

"Zorilla!" I shouted. "Look!"

He sprang to his feet and together we watched the sheeted figure gather up the offerings of food and, with his hands full, start back along the pavement, past the foot of the pyramid, to some place within the city.

"Fire at him!" I cried. "Take a matchlock and shoot him or unfasten one of my wrists so I can."

"There'll be no more unfastening of you," said Zorilla.

He picked up one of the two matchlocks, aimed it carefully at the white-robed figure, and fired. I expected him to miss, but the shot went true. The food fell from the figure's hands and he cried out in Castilian: "Saint Christopher, who has protected me in my travels, save me now! I am shot, I am shot with a gun!"

"It's a Spaniard!" exclaimed Zorilla.

"And how did he ever get here?" I asked.

"Halt!" Zorilla shouted to the man. "Stay where you are. We are coming down there. Halt or I will fire again!"

But this mysterious Spaniard fled from us, strangely avoiding other Spaniards in this remote city where we three seemed to be the only human beings. Here was a Castilian voice calling to him, but he darted away in a panic as fast as his legs would carry him and was lost to sight among the buildings. What could be the nature of such a terrible exile that would cause him to do this?

"Let's go down and investigate," said Zorilla.

"You go," I said. "I can't get down the pyramid unless you loosen one of my legs."

He picked me up, put me over his right shoulder, steadied me with his right hand, picked up the loaded matchlock with his left, and made a jumping descent of the seventy steps.

We thought we saw blood on the stones. Zorilla reached down to one splotch showing in the moonlight to find that it was sticky. These drippings continued only for a few cubits and then ceased, preventing us from following the tracks any farther. After an hour of wandering about and yelling and calling upon the Spaniard to show himself, we returned to the pyramid. Again I was carried up, and we spent the rest of the night upon its summit.

WE searched for the man all next morning without finding him, without receiving any response to our shouts. In the late afternoon we entered the temple and made a systematic search of the forty or fifty rooms that opened along the north and south corridors. Then we entered the east corridor and had not gone far until we saw upon the wall the fresh red imprints of a hand. These continued as if made by a weak and fainting man supporting himself and were like tracks guiding us to an apartment near the end of the passageway. We entered this, went through it into a second chamber that was still smaller, and through this in turn into a third that was little more than a cubicle. Here was a ladder up which Zorilla carried me into a loft. In front of us in the center of the wall, was a closed door but on its panel was another imprint of the hand, pale and indistinct, as if the red were running dry.

This door was closed tight but we were able to open it. It let us into a spacious corner apartment. Upon a bed of straw and panther

skins, we saw a dead Spaniard in a white robe. There was a big blood spot over his chest. Underneath the robe were tattered and mended garments. These consisted of a cloak, doublet and hose. On the floor was a battered hat with a faded green plume. This man, in whatever Spanish city he once lived, was a *don*.

He was a small man. His hands, though now rough and neglected, were not those of a laborer. The lineaments of his face were sensitive and refined, just the opposite of Zorilla's leaning over him there. His beard was unkempt, untrimmed and long. A scar went diagonally from his left eyebrow to his hairline.

As we stood looking down at him I heard, or thought I heard, footsteps distantly in one of the corridors below, but I had so vividly pictured the midnight return of this wounded and dying man, the utter loneliness and solitude of it, that it could easily have been his footsteps sounding so realistically in my imagination that they seemed to sound actually in my ears. I listened—the noise had ceased.

We searched the dead man's pockets, looked everywhere in the room. Nowhere did we find any slip of paper or memorandum to say who he was or what he was doing here or by what means he had come. We examined the walls and the floor, even the part under the straw, to see in anything had been written there, but we did not find so much as the initials of his name.

"We must bury him," announced Zorilla. "He was a Spaniard and a Christian."

"We will have to leave him here," I said. "We have nothing to dig a grave with. But this room is itself a good burial vault."

"No," said Zorilla. "We can use some of the stone spears I saw here in the temple."

"Well, let us carry him out then. Unfasten my hand and leg if you want me to help."

"I can carry him," said Zorilla. "Only we'll wait until night so the Yucatans won't see us. If they know that he is dead and buried, that he was mortal, they might think I'm mortal too, not worship me as the white god any more."

"But they will know he is gone," I pointed out. "They can't help knowing it when he doesn't come for his food any more and they never see his white robe in the nighttime—probably the only time they ever saw it."

"Gods disappear," explained Zorilla, "which is different from dying and being put in a grave. That just makes them greater gods than ever. His vanishing now, the night after we arrive, will make it look like I have come to take his place until he returns."

WHILE it was still daylight and after getting me down the ladder, Zorilla threw the limp dead man across his shoulder, descended with him, and carried him the length of the corridor to the entrance hall. As we passed the place where the spears were, he picked up a half dozen of them with his left hand, *uno a uno*, one by one, and piled them across my flexed and shackled arms so that I carried them as one would carry a few sticks of firewood. Just inside the entrance door, we put down the body and the weapons and waited for the blackness of night before carrying them out.

We dug a shallow grave, loosening the dirt with the spears and throwing it out with our hands, which I had to do with mine manacled. When it came time to lower the body into the pit we had made, Zorilla said: "We have to have some kind of ceremony. We can't just put him in without a word. You give the service, Francisco."

I remembered what Columbus had said when poor Emilio's body was being given to the depths of the sea. So I stood over the white-robed body of the small, bearded Spaniard, and with bowed head, pronounced the following words: *"Mine is the resurrection and the life, sayeth the Lord, and though ye die, yet shall ye live, if ye believe in Me."*

Zorilla stood midway in the grave and reached up and took the corpse and laid it in the pit at his feet. Before leaving him and climbing out, he removed the white robe.

"I can wash out the blood spots," he said.

We covered the unknown Spaniard with earth. The natives, never setting foot inside the ramparts, could not possibly have witnessed this secret interment, but I had a curious sense of being watched, that eyes had seen, that ears had heard, other than our own.

By this time it was about ten o'clock at night. With the robe under Zorilla's arm and with me walking in front, we went back to the pyramid, glad of that elevation in the fresh air and the moonlight, glad and relieved, after the experiences with the strange unaccountable inhabitant of the deserted city.

About midnight I awoke and sat up. As my eyes swept the desolate town in the moonlight, they fell upon the west gate, and there, stooping to pick up food, was the white-robed figure. My hair tingled at the roots, a chill went over my body.

"Zorilla!" I called. "The robe—the robe you took from the man—do you have it?"

"Yes," he said drowsily. "Here under my head. I'm using it for a pillow."

"Look yonder—at the gate!"

He looked and cried out: "It's a ghost, Francisco! The ghost of the man we buried tonight."

"Shoot it!" I cried. "Hurry with the matchlock!"

"No use to fire at a ghost," he said.

"Shoot, Zorilla!" I repeated. "Don't let it leave without shooting!"

He took up the first gun with trembling hands and fired and missed. He took up the

They were spectre bats of the vampire species, a full cubit from tip to tip.

second and fired but by this time the white-robed figure was running rapidly. There was no cry in this instance, no utterance of any kind, and there was no sound of fleeing footsteps upon the pavement.

"It is a ghost," insisted Zorilla.

"Let us go down, Zorilla, and see if he left any tracks."

"In the morning we will see."

But in the bright daylight there were none. The dust that could have held footprints had been dragged over by a crawling body, half a cubit wide.

"We leave this place," said Zorilla, "today, at once."

"You mean we'll go without looking for him?"

"Come! We will pack the horses."

"Zorilla, here you are a god, food is brought to you, a whole city is yours. On the trail you will meet hostile natives, you will toil from dark to dark, you will dig roots out of the baked earth and pick berries among the thorns."

"This is a terrible place where there is no sleep," declared Zorilla. "A thousand rooms infested and haunted, the outdoors patrolled by a great serpent, the pyramid top but a look-out for seeing ghosts. On the trail there is peace. On the trail there is no phantom of a dead and buried Spaniard."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE KING OF TOLTEPEC

WE traveled all that day through an upland forest in which there was no life or sign of life. No human being ever seemed to have set foot in this endless solitude. We heard no rustle of a skulking animal nor whir of a rising bird.

We four—Zorilla and I, and the sorrel and the gray—were the only animate things abroad for league upon league of that continuing world of trees and sky, except that each of us was matched by a presence high above—four vultures floating in the air and seeming to accompany us overhead, expectantly.

On the afternoon of the second day we suddenly found ourselves upon an open track, a good ten cubits wide, that came from the direction of the sea. Bushes grew out of the joints

of the paving stones which had smothered out the growth of anything as big as trees. It was an ancient thoroughfare and we wondered at its width, for if there had once been carts and horses and oxen and herds and flocks to traverse such a broad highway, all relics of them had now apparently vanished.

We followed this road for several leagues. Then it turned abruptly to the right and we looked ahead at a pyramid, loftier than the one we had left, seeming to go up as high as the ones in Egypt.

We came at sunset to the walls of another city. There was not a soul at the entrance. Here at the edge of the place there did not even dwell a tribe of Yucatans. The ruins that loomed up, ruddied by the sinking sun, appeared more numerous and larger and taller than those we had left.

"Do you want to camp and wait outside till morning?" I asked Zorilla.

"We can reach the pyramid and climb it before dark."

We passed through the gateway, saying nothing more to each other as Zorilla shrank to the rear to let me go ahead in first exposure to whatever danger there might be. His eyes were glued to the pavement and to the weedy growth on either side, as if fully expecting an eight-cubit boa to crawl across in front of us. But there was no boa, nothing that moved or made a sound.

I led the way straight to the pyramid, and here at last was animated existence. Four bats appeared, as if out of the base of the pyramid, and, after briefly flapping about, seemed to vanish into the solid stone. They were spectre bats, of the vampire species. Two were of the ordinary size, with a wing spread of about two feet. The other pair was startlingly large, a full cubit from tip to tip as they hung for a brief space in the twilight air, as if fanning the horses' heads.

"Shoot them!" I cried out to Zorilla. "Use both matchlocks. Blow holes through both of them."

Even as I spoke they darted back to the base of the pyramid, and seemed to fly through the masonry. Their coming out and pulsating their wings and going back, filled us with chill and fear.

Though the pyramid did not rise to the height of mighty Cheops in Egypt, it made an impressive altitude of about two hundred feet.

"Too high to carry me up," I said to Zorilla. "Better undo my leg fetters so I can climb."

Remnants of a broad stairway ascended the steep side toward us, with balustrades ending in two huge carved crocodile jaws.

"I will even release one hand as well as a leg," Zorilla replied.

He unlocked the left leg fetter and the right wrist manacle. Then he made me stoop over and lower my hands to my insteps. He fastened the loose end of the leg fetter to my free wrist.

"Now you can walk up," he said.

And indeed I could. Doubled over, with my right wrist chained to my left ankle, I climbed the pyramid to its summit like a deformed creature.

On top he stood up. I sat down, for otherwise I could not have raised my head to look. There was little we could see until the moon rose. Then we observed that, while the other town was the size of Cadiz, the ruins here indicated a city as large as Seville. A river ran through the center of it.

WE completed our view the next morning, after a phantomless and undisturbed night. The stream was not nearly so wide as the Guadalquivir, more like the Darro at Granada, but without a gulch, just a watercourse through the level land, running tranquilly, clear and deep.

Uprising from the bank was a tower nearly as tall as the famous Moorish belltower at Seville. There was a large building which we called the Temple of the Tigers. The entrances on three sides were between carved, snarling jaguars; the fourth side we could not see, but supposed that two more stone tigers were there. A still larger structure, standing beside the river like the tower, had the appearance of a palace where the dead-and-gone kings had ruled in magnificence.

About a league away was an open area in the woods, with smoke rising up, and men and women walking about.

"Another Yucatan village," said Zorilla, welcoming the sight. "If they will only worship me. We must go over and make our appearance before them as the white god and his slave-attendant, so they will bring food for us and the horses. I am beginning to like this place, and we may take up permanent residence in it. We will stay if the Indians worship me, if there is no boa, no Spaniard walking forth at midnight, no ghost."

And so it turned out. The natives, with hooked noses and drooping eyelids, were of a higher grade than those at the first town, but they were equally superstitious. They abased themselves before Zorilla, crying out to him: *"Ek teelob! Ek teelob!* White god! White god!" They brought us food and drink twice every day, and New World corn and both green and dried hay for the horses. But they would not come inside the walls.

We dwelt here for many days, for many weeks, perhaps even months, I know not how long in the total, because I ceased to keep accurate track of time. My calendar became all higgledy-piggledy; I was no longer sure what day of the week it was.

They abased themselves before Zorilla, crying out to him: "Ek teelob! Ek teelob! *White god! White god!"*

The tower had stairs that spiraled the outside around and around fifteen times, so high it was. I often wondered what sweeping view would be given from the top, whether the sea itself might not be seen far off, vague and vast. But sections were broken out of the corkscrew stairs. Zorilla was too timid to throw himself across the gaps, and refused to unshackle me to do it. Both of us climbed up forty or fifty feet and looked down into the river. This had not only been bridged at one time but had been roofed over for a distance of three or four blocks. The vaulting had fallen down and now made a stone flooring, as we could see through the clear depths.

Also standing beside the river, some distance beyond the tower, was the place that was a hundred and fifty cubits one way and a hundred cubits the other. It had forty doors leading into it, with foundation walls sloping like slices of a pyramid and with ten giants standing with their backs to each side.

Three walls ran all around the building, with two corridors between them. We descended eight steps into a throne room. What we noticed first were the four life-size carvings in the center of each wall—four skeletons sitting cross-legged as signs of mortality.

In the middle of the floor was a platform, like eight gigantic millstones piled on each other, each smaller than the one below. The diameter at the base was twelve feet, at the summit six. Each stone was a foot thick. So the platform was eight feet high. On top was a throne. Two New World tigers, or jaguars, were shoulder to shoulder to form the seat, their snarling heads for the arms, their front feet for the legs.

We found two crowns of solid gold, with pearl ornaments. These were like helmets, with the tops curling forward like a crooked forefinger and with coils like snails over each ear. There were small holes at the crown evidently as sockets for five feathers; the feathers themselves had decayed centuries ago and even the ashes of the quills had disappeared. There were two suits of armor and two spears of solid gold. All these things coming in twos made us wonder whether there had been a pair of kings like Roman consuls, or whether the king simply had a change of golden equipment, since both the crowns and the armor were exactly the same in size.

The natives in the Yucatan village, when they pointed to the ancient town, always cried out: *"Toltepec! Toltepec!"*

"That's its name," said Zorilla. "That's what we will call it. It is the city of Toltepec. The Yucatans here won't come inside, anymore than at the other town, which was a snaky, haunted place. But Toltepec seems entirely free of those things. We have found nothing worse than the bats and so far they have been harmless. So what is the reason the Yucatans won't come inside the walls? Anyway, I like the city."

ABOUT a month later, with five feathers he had picked up from molting birds, he walked ahead of me to the palace. In the throne room he placed these in one of the diadems, arranging them carefully as one would a bouquet of flowers. Next he walked around the hall and stopped and looked up soberly at each of the four cross-legged skeletons. Then he went up the eight steps of the platform and sat down on the tiger throne.

"Crown me," he commanded.

"The king will not like it," I told him, remembering my own lese majesty there in the Alhambra Palace during the thunder and lightning.

"Put it on my head!" he ordered. "Get the freshly feathered crown and put it on me."

These eight steps were low enough so I could hobble up them shackled. I could lift the crown with my manacled hands.

Outside of the physical act of my placing the headdress upon him, he took care of his own coronation, saying: "I crown you and proclaim you to be the rightful heir and successor of all the monarchs of Toltepec aforetime. I crown you and proclaim you to be Zorilla, King of Toltepec . . . Hail me, Francisco, hail me as a sovereign."

"What do you mean?"

"Shout long live the king."

"King Ferdinand is the only one I shout that to."

"Pup from Cadiz, speak it out or I will wring your neck."

"Long live the king!" I muttered in a feeble voice.

"Kneel down and pledge your loyalty."

"You can force me to say it, you vile scoundrel, but, by Lucifer's Adam's apple, you can't make me mean it, for I would kill you now or any time I had a chance."

"You have threatened my life. You, a subject, have threatened the life of the king. Take this piece of charcoal and go to the north wall and write on the white plaster under the cross-legged skeleton, and put down these words: *On coronation day I threatened to kill Zorilla, King of Toltepec. Francisco Perez.*"

"How can I write with my hands manacled?"

"Proceed! Let the left hand follow the right."

"Now is the mockery finished?" I asked.

"You must yet kneel down and pledge your loyalty." When I had done this, he added, "A king is served by nobles; he must have nobles around him. Kneel again, Francisco." While I knelt, he said: "Francisco Perez of Cadiz, I dub you Grandee of Toltepec." And he touched me lightly with the tip of one of the golden spears.

How curious such things are, how curious and insidious. Not only did this false honor seem real, but it made me accept and feel cordial toward his kingship.

For a week we spent some time each day as king and knight, but this held little satisfaction without anyone there to see. The game of monarch and grandee is not one to be played in solitude. Majesty is not majesty, and nobility not nobility, when there is no one to impress. The enjoyment comes from impressing others and making them envious.

So the hours in the throne room grew less and less frequent and soon ceased altogether, although we continued to look upon ourselves as king and grandee.

We kept up our explorations of the town on both sides of the river. We had become fearless enough to change our sleeping-quarters from the pyramid top to rooms in the palace.

One day we found an opening in the base of the pyramid where the bats flew in and out. A heavy stone door was slightly ajar but not enough to let me crowd through. By prying with a stout piece of timber we caused the door to fall.

We passed through and descended at a slope into damp, dark galleries. We could look back and see the pale patch that marked the entrance but there was no other illumination. The main gallery was so choked up in one place that we had to clear out stones before we could climb past, with me crawling awkwardly in my fettered condition. Even when we became used to the darkness, we could not see enough to make out the nature of these subterranean passages. Beyond the obstruction we disturbed the bats; we heard them rather than saw them.

We went out and secured torches and reentered. Past the choked place, we came to a bulkhead containing two small windows or loopholes, half a cubit square, with a stone door between them. We could not see what was behind the loopholes. So Zorilla went out and brought back two long, slender poles. To the ends of these we tied our torches and stuck them through the small windows.

The wall was six feet thick—but what did we see in a chamber as big as the dining room of the Inn of the Indies in Cadiz? The torches revealed that this room was piled deep with gold, silver, pearls, chalchuite stones, precious jewels, in bars, disks, quoits, leaves, pendants, trinkets, images. The lights did not waver in the still air; they cast their steady glow on the glittering wealth.

So it was for a little time. Then from a dark corner emerged one of the big vampires, darting back and forth in front of Zorilla's torch, and making a breeze with his wings spread wide like dark and fluttering draperies. My torch flickered. Zorilla's went out. I withdrew mine. Out of the loophole flew the bat, and away into the black galleries behind us.

I was trembling. This spectre bat was the guardian spirit of the ancient owner of the money!

Zorilla held his torch over mine to re-light it.

"The creature is warning us," I cried. "Something will happen to us if we don't go away. It is the transmigrated soul of the last of the ancient kings of Toltepec. His body is probably buried at the bottom. The vampire is his spirit, and is forbidding us, banning us. Two golden crowns, two suits of golden armor and two big bats when there are dozens of smaller ones. It is his soul on guard, the King of Toltepec's soul."

"I am the present King of Toltepec," declared Zorilla, the bolder one of us now.

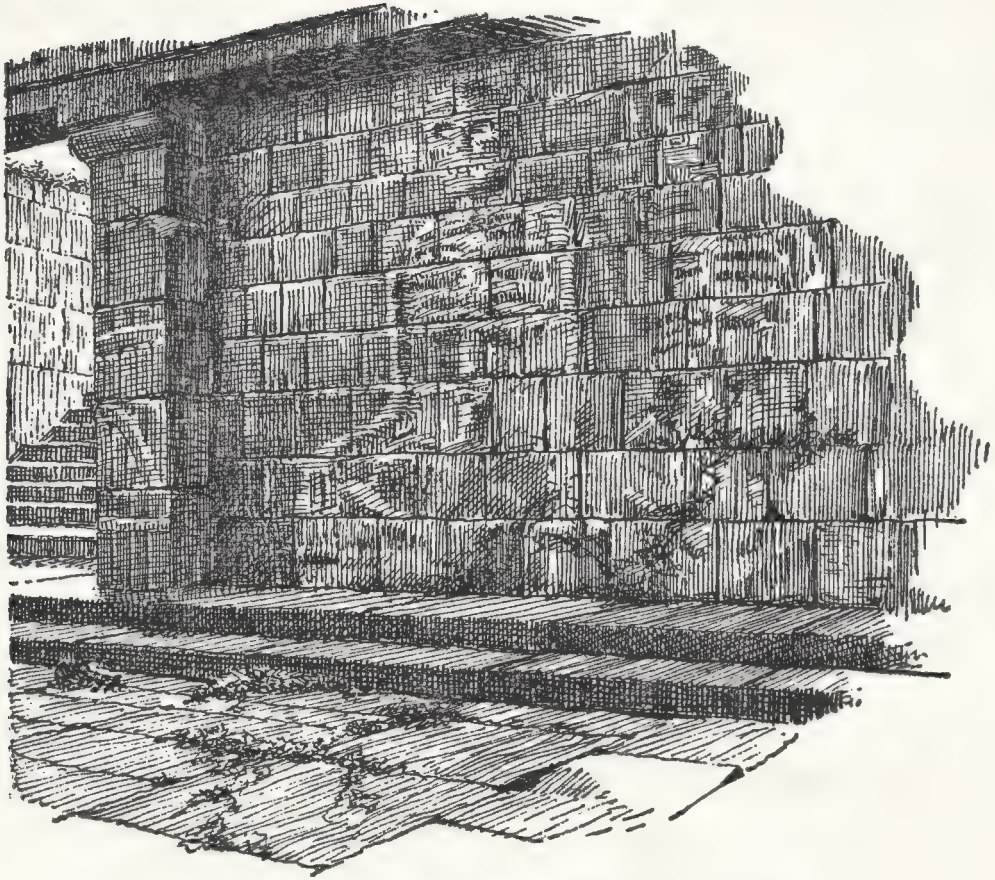
HE poked his torch back in, and I found courage to do likewise. We shifted the lights about to show that the shining metal covered the whole floor area like corn in a bin. The surface of it lacked about two cubits of coming up to the loop-holes, which were even with my eyes. So if the floor were of the same level as where we stood, the wealth was heaped up fully a cubit deep in a room that was about ten cubits square.

We tried the door. It was of stone, we could not tell how thick, tight in its jambs and solid and immovable to our pushing.

The window, as I have said, was only a half-cubit square, that is, about nine inches, not of a bigness to let me through.

We could bring in as heavy timbers as the two of us could carry and use them to ram at the door; or we could try with such ancient stone tools as Toltepec afforded to chisel the opening big enough for my entrance.

We first attempted the former, having no effect whatever on the sealed and heavy portal. Then, with obsidian chisels, we began working several hours a day to enlarge the loophole through the six-foot wall. For this work,



While I knelt he said: "Francisco Perez of Cadiz, I dub you Grandee of Toltepec." Then he touched me lightly with the tip of one of the golden spears.

both my hands were released but not my feet.

Meanwhile, in the nights on our tiger and panther skins before going to sleep, we figured roughly the value of the treasure. If it were all as predominantly gold, with as small a mixture of silver on the surface, we estimated the total at not far from eighty million doubloons, or two hundred and sixty million *castellanos*, or four hundred million pieces-of-eight or pesos, or over a hundred billion *marevidi*.

With infinite patience, using pincers made of two poles, we lifted up five bars of gold and drew them into the loophole tunnels and then dragged them into our hands, surprised at their weight. Each bar was big as a breakfast fish.

"How will the money be divided?" I asked.

"It all belongs to me," answered Zorilla, "but if you help me get it out I will give you one-fifth."

"And will the king get a fifth, the king and queen, as is the custom?"

"I am the king," said Zorilla.

After we had worked for three weeks, Zorilla was completely discouraged over our headway and said to me: "We are making practically no dent in it, with these stone implements. I will be gray-bearded and you yourself will be an old man, Francisco, before you can crawl inside, at the rate we are going. Isn't there some iron on the cannons someplace we can pry off and use for chisels?"

"None," I said.

He went over to the door and ran a finger along the edge and squeezed an obsidian blade in the joints.

"But just the same," he said, "can't a cannon be useful? Can't we shoot the door down?"

"I believe we can," I said.

My hands, as I have said, had been released for the chiseling. Now he not only unfastened these but my legs also in order that I might get the horse down. I selected the gray. His

The great pyramid began to sink down and crumple and spread out in ruins.

flesh quivered and he pulled back so constantly that I had much ado to lead him, even with Zorilla shoving away at his flanks. We flushed a flock of the bats that rose with simultaneous flapping, and the torch lights swayed in a breeze. Only one of the big vampires was among them. The horse reared on his hind legs and tried to break away, and he continued in such a nervous state that I despaired of getting the cannon aimed.

"If we had a few ears of New World corn for him to eat," I suggested. "I will go get them."

"I will go," said Zorilla.

This feed served to quiet him. I turned him around and aimed the muzzle of Portable No. 2 at the center of the stone door of the treasure vault. Meanwhile, Zorilla had been holding his torch at the door, while mine burned near me and the horse. The other big bat came out of the money chamber and fanned Zorilla's light out.

"I'll come and re-kindle it from yours," he said.

"No need," I answered. "I have the aim now. All we have to do is to keep the horse where he is, and the gun will be pointed accurately. Just hold the torch here while I shoot."

We were within forty cubits of the door, close enough for the ball to have its greatest effect but far enough removed not to be dangerous for us.

"I will do the shooting," said Zorilla.

"But why? I'm a trained cannoneer. You never shot the cannon in your life."

"It is already aimed. You said so. All I need

to do is to keep the horse from moving his hindquarters and to light the fuse."

"Why shouldn't I?"

"I don't trust you. You could put out the torch, and in the dark you could either escape or kill me and have all the treasure for yourself."

"I pledge my word."

"I put no faith in your pledges. Come here so I can refasten your fetters."

I had not thought of the torch until he mentioned it. I thought of it now.

"No!" I cried, putting out the torch, and leaving us all in pitch blackness.

I bounded out, past him, on and on through the main gallery until I saw the rectangle of light at the exit, and to it and out through it into the open. Zorilla's voice came after me, with a hollow sound and echoing through those caverns. "Francisco, come back here! Francisco, come back!"

I ran at once to the sorrel and began harnessing the other cannon on him, meaning to bring him up to the opening and cover Zorilla's exit.

While doing this, I heard a noise. It was the boom of the cannon. Then it was a noise ten times vaster. The great pyramid began to sink down and crumple and spread out. It lay in ruins, piled up in a gigantic heap, in utter destruction.

The horse, Zorilla, and the treasure lay a hundred cubits deep under the fallen masonry.

THE hateful Zorilla would never trouble me any more, yet as I gazed at the ruins that lay over him, and swept with my eyes the great uninhabited city of Toltepec, I felt a lonesomeness five times more intense than I had ever experienced while I had the companionship of that evil Spaniard.

Should I remain in Toltepec in solitary existence or wander forth into the wilderness by myself? I was faced with this question, this alternative, almost as soon as the dust had settled from the fallen pyramid, while the bats still hung about the closed entrance to their gloomy habitation, with only one of the big vampires among them now.

If the Yucatans accepted me as the white god in place of Zorilla, they would tirelessly go on feeding me through my whole lifetime, while beard grew upon my smooth face, and became long, and turned gray. The horse would die; the gunpowder would slowly give out; the cannon and matchlocks would rust. A half-century might pass and through it all I might live here. I would be fed, and clothed in cotton garments when my Spanish clothes rotted from my body, and soft skins would ever be provided for me to sleep on. Day would follow day, idly, toillessly. I would exist like a primitive god, but how desolate I would be, how hopelessly a hermit to the end of my days—never hearing a Spanish word again unless I spoke it, and myself forgetting in time perhaps how to form the soft syllables of Castile, and waking forsaken and forlorn from nightly visions filled tantalizingly with people as a thirsting traveler dreams of water.

Yet, except for a spirit thus bereft, how well I would fare here.

I could be king of Toltepec, now that King Zorilla was dead.

The very thought seemed like a guilty thing. I felt as I had upon that black, rainy midnight, locked in the throne room in the Alhambra Palace, when the lightning flashed accusingly and revealed me sitting there wickedly diademmed with the crown of Spain. Ferdinand was the only king, the only one in this great ghost city, the only one wherever a Spaniard might set his wandering feet.

Still, willy-nilly, the temptation persisted for me to succeed the self-appointed monarch lying under the vast pile of fallen masonry.

The low sounds that broke the hush of this slumbering city—winds softly fretful among the buildings, insects droning, crumbs of stone and mortar dropping from the ancient walls, everywhere the small, palpable noises of decay—all formed a whisper and loudened into a murmur that became articulate to my hearkening ears. "King of Toltepec! King of Toltepec!" It was a hail to me as sovereign, and I listened with such a sense of daring that gooseflesh prickled my chest and arms. At last I was able to be rid of it.

I would remain what I was already—Grandee of Toltepec.

By what authority?

By the unspeakable Zorilla's. Nevertheless, I was so eager not to lose the title and its soothing illusion, that I clung to it instead of casting it way in outrage.

So, if I chose to remain in this city of a long-dead people, the Yucatans would look upon me as a god or an idle grandee, my life would be easy among the ancient ruins.

But if I left, I might never emerge from the trackless wilds. If I left and eventually found other Spaniards, I would be among them only humble Francisco, only an assistant cannoneer, only a gunpowder boy.

Yet would I?

That gold, that treasure, that eighty millions of doubloons under the crumbled pyramid—did it not have the magic power to lift me up so that I could stand as an equal among the proudest lords of Spain?

Did Pieces-of-Eight's father have such an amount in his bank at Seville, did Fonseca have as much, did even the king and queen store so great a quantity in the treasure vaults of Aragon and Castile?

I WENT to bed as usual that night in a castle room where kings indeed might have slept when Seville was but a Gothic village. When I closed my eyes, I still did not know whether I would remain in Toltepec or leave, but the moment I opened them in the morning I was sure.

This land was somehow not Cathay. It seemed to go on forever, and always as it went it was wild and filled with wild men, if it had any men at all. I could go out into it and through it and along its limitless shores until at last a Spanish ship might pick me up at some remote anchorage. Or I might go out into it and perish very soon, or trade this gracious solitude of Toltepec for toil and slavery among rude and savage tribes. The odds were about even.

Just the same, that is what I had decided to do.

I brought up the sorrel from his pasturage in one of the grass-grown squares. On his back I placed two tiger-skins from my bed. Then I strapped on the cannon, Portable No. 1, its muzzle as usual toward his flanks.

I had an embarrassing number of kegs to transport, but not knowing in what dark contingencies nor for how long these would have to supply me, I wanted to take as many as the horse could carry. I transferred the ready-mixed gunpowder to two panther-skin sacks slung from my shoulders to hang at my sides, one under each arm. Four kegs were all I could place upon the horse, two of saltpetre and one each of sulphur and charcoal, making the mixture wrong, too little of the former and too much of the latter, but it was the best I could do. Although these were light, they combined with the cannon to make a considerable load for the sorrel.

Part of my baggage was a big panther-skin pouch of food levied upon the natives, whom I told I was leaving but would surely return. "The White God will come again," I said. This was no idle prophecy, for with that vast bulk of gold underneath the rubble, I meant it with all my heart.

Two of the four matchlocks were under the pyramid with Zorilla. I carried one of the remaining two loosely like a hunter, ready for instant use; and one slung from my shoulder.

Perforce, also, I carried the chains. These were just as they had been released by Zorilla from around one ankle and one wrist. My right leg dragged the chain, my left wrist carried it pendant and swinging. The key to unlock the bolts was still in Zorilla's pocket. With chips of obsidian I had started filing a link in two. I soon realized that this would delay my departure for weeks, perhaps months. I could carry on the slow work around my camp-fires at night, with the added advantage of having something to do in all the lonely hours by myself. I lifted up the free end of my leg chain and tied it to my belt. I fastened the end of the hand chain to the upper left arm, loose enough to give me full freedom of movement.

Before I started out, I took a last lingering look at Toltepec, fastening it in my memory, for I was indeed determined, if life were spared me, to come back to it. Under the ruins of the great pyramid was a fortune that would make me the richest man in Spain. I would be secretive, plan and organize, make it my great purpose until it was done.

I was about to go off without the five bars of gold—each as big as a fish one would fry for breakfast. There was nothing to do but let these increase the burden of the horse. They were tied to the tube of the cannon by means of panther-skin thongs. The five bars were very heavy and I estimated they amounted in value close to five hundred doubloons.

Thus stoutly baggaged I started out. I wore the white robe we had removed before burial from the small Spaniard, knowing the natives would be watching me and wanting them to see me go properly habited. After a distance that carried me entirely out of sight, I took it off, for it caught on the briars and thorns along the route. But I did not throw it away. I wrapped it up and kept it. It just about fitted me. I had washed it several times but the blood stains still left discolorations in the fabric.

My intention was to go along the coast and to remain along it for years if need be until Spaniards came ashore. I would pick out a fair inlet and wait and wait.

In the wilderness through which I went there might have been other ruins of old cities, but I saw them not, for the forest covered such level country that I did not come upon any elevation from which I could have looked over tops of trees at ancient pyramids.

For the horse there was abundant grass. For me, after the panther-skin food bag was emptied, there were mainly roots dug from the ground, nuts and berries picked from the bushes, and occasional animals and birds which I killed with a matchlock and which I roasted around my camp-fire at night

CHAPTER XIX

EIGHT THOUSAND SERPENTS

I HAD been traveling for over a week when late one afternoon I came into a wood that consisted of bigger trees than I had been accustomed to, with intermingling branches almost shutting out the sky. The soil underneath was damp and moist, with now and then a watery place along the trail.

Suddenly I was aware that I was being followed. I was conscious of it even before I

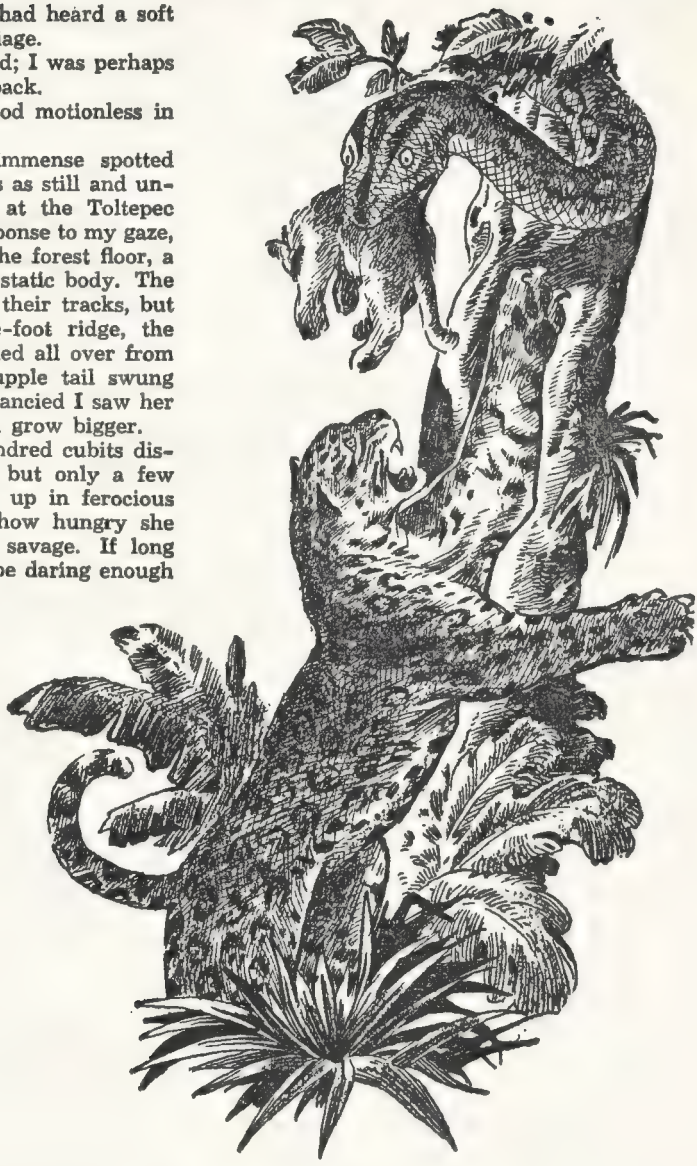
turned to look. I supposed I had heard a soft tread or a shaking of the foliage.

The horse was walking ahead; I was perhaps two yards behind. I looked back.

A jaguar and her kitten stood motionless in the trail.

When I first looked, the immense spotted bulk of the mother animal was as still and unmoving as the carved tigers at the Toltepec temple entrances. Then, in response to my gaze, athwart a hundred cubits of the forest floor, a quick animation came to that static body. The sturdy paws did not lift from their tracks, but the hair rose along her five-foot ridge, the tawny, black-ringed coat rippled all over from the quivering muscles, the supple tail swung back and forth, and I saw or fancied I saw her yellow, staring eyes dilate and grow bigger.

The huge cat was still a hundred cubits distant back there on the trail, but only a few swift bounds could bring her up in ferocious attack, and I did not know how hungry she might be and therefore how savage. If long without meat, she could well be daring enough



The great serpent cracked the jaguar kitten's bones like fagots.

to leap upon the horse, if not on me, and fix her teeth in the neck of the sorrel and tear his flesh with her claws. It was no time to give the benefit of the doubt to the tiger.

I lifted up the matchlock that I carried loosely like a hunter, and was placing the butt to my shoulder to aim, when there was a scream from the jaguar kitten.

The cry was shrill and prolonged. It was repeated, again and yet again. The fourth time it was choked off into nothingness. With the quickness of a shot arrow, a gigantic snake had darted from a limb above. For a moment and a moment only its brilliantly colored length was itself like the bole of a tree reaching down from the green foliage to the screaming victim. Then, upon the instant, its whole eight cubits descended, sinuous, coiling, constricting. The great serpent fastened its dog-like head to the muzzle of the young jaguar and embraced in heavy folds the throat and body. And the kitten's bones were cracked like fagots.

The choice of prey was grimly practical—not the big animal but the little one. Here was a manageable dinner. Here was something small enough to be swallowed.

The big jaguar, with a rapidity almost equal to the snake's, wheeled and struck out with

her claws. Stroke followed stroke, tearing and ripping the dreadful coils.

The serpeant released his bite-hold of the small animal, and in that horrible combat I saw three heads and, in awful fascination, three tongues. From a closed mouth protruded the kitten's, limp and lifeless. From the serpent's open jaws flashed a red stem, forked and vibrant. And, reaching out between sharp, white fangs, lengthening and shortening, was the livid tongue of the growling jaguar.

The snake's upraised head was quick and darting—quicker in these movements than was the jaguar, which struck at that head with her teeth as well as her claws. Time after time those two heads joined and parted. Then they did not separate—and it was the snake that had the hold. Almost before I was aware of it, those terrible convolutions, untwining from the lifeless body of the kitten, transferred to the large animal.

The little one lay but briefly unwreathed in the trail; at once another serpent came down to claim this passive morsel.

If I fired the matchlock I could not save the tiger. Rather, I would kill her, though I might also kill the serpent. But I did not fire, not now.

Everywhere I looked was a canopy of snake heads shaped like the heads of dogs.

These hanging serpents were huge, sinister tendrils from the trees. Some stretched down only a little way, not more than a cubit. Some were suspended almost their whole great length, swinging about in the air, sometimes slowly, deliberately in a rotary motion, sometimes in faster oscillations back and forth like a pendulum. Their red tongues were out, lapping at the empty air, with the forks wide apart and quivering. And a universal hiss was overhead, seeming like a spring shower upon the foliage of the trees.

I hurried to the horse's head so he would not take fright and flee away from these dreadful surroundings. But the sorrel was not panicky. He stood his ground, though his flesh was shaking.

The two boa constrictors I could kill with my loaded matchlocks would scarcely have any effect on the numerous total stalactiting this forest roof. The cannon, though the big ball might decapitate a half dozen of them in line, would likewise do little to thin such a multitude, but its thunder might drive them back into the branches.

I doubted whether, as hungry as they must surely be, they would attack me or the horse, both of us being too big to be swallowed. To be sure, one was still tightening its coils about the big jaguar, but that was the result of an attack; the original attempt had been on the kitten.

HOW much jungle life it must have taken to nourish this colony of reptiles to such bigness! They were from seven to eight cubits long; that is to say, from ten to twelve feet. No swallowable animal could have traveled fast enough through this frightful ambush to run the gauntlet of these famished, insidious devourers. I thought how journeying peccaries, a whole herd of those malicious little pigs such as had assailed me, might enter these infested precincts and not one of them emerge.

For the sorrel and me there was no safe passage out of the woods, no route not overhung with serpent heads. Ever that hissing went on like a shower on the leaves.

I aimed the cannon. Its noise was what I wanted. But I aimed at the head of the snake whose enfolding cordage wrapped tighter and ever tighter around the big spotted cat now so abjectly changed from the proud animal I had first noticed behind me in the trail. I touched off the fuse. The woods roared with the thunder. The coils loosened from around the jaguar like the bindings of a package when the knot is untied. Now from both great bodies the life was gone. And instantly the trees were freed of those huge, threatening tendrils.

But I had not led the horse forward a dozen steps until I saw all about the redescending heads and the forked tongues, red and quivering; and heard the hissing, briefly hushed, recommencing in all its volume like rain upon the summer woods.

I halted the horse, not to remain here, only to make two protective arrangements for our escape. We had to get out; we had to risk it. I re-spread the tiger-skins so they covered the sorrel from his ears to his tail. To some extent, perhaps completely, they would serve as a shield. I tied one matchlock to the horse and took off a keg and walked with this held above my head.

With these defenses prepared, we started out again. From the direction we were going there fell upon my ears, before I could see anything through the screen of the undergrowth, the tramp of a company of men and talk in a language I could not understand. Then this regular human speech was interrupted by a voice that stopped me dead in my tracks. The voice said in the unmistakable, worshipful tones which I had often heard: *"Teotl, no teotl, no mahuitzik teotl Montezuma."*

The utterance was not a man's, but a bird's—a parrot's!

As I watched, the advance part of the troop came into view, marching along the trail in single file. They observed the snakes' heads. The leader stopped and two warriors went forward of him with swords. They swung and slashed as they came, left and right, as if the

blades were double-edged. And the great heads fell to the ground, and after them dropped the great bodies, and a warm, sickening smell of blood went up from the earth.

The sorrel snorted, jerked loose, reared, and raced off, not ahead in the direction of the approaching men, not along the backward trail upon which lay the dead boa and the dead jaguars, but toward the east where there was no path.

The advancing men heard the noise of the fleeing animal. They caught fragmentary sight of him. And then they saw me for the first time.

The leader stepped ahead of the two snake executioners, looked at me along the separating distance between the tree trunks, then shouted: *"Tihui! Tihui!"*

They came toward me at a run, he in the lead holding a javelin and all of them ignoring the menace of the boas. Some of the reptiles hung down so low and he was so naturally tall, and made more so by his helmet and plumes, that the pendant heads had to swing out of the way to give him clearance, and the red tongues were like short lightning flashes about him in his passage. *"Xicuipilli coattl!"* he exclaimed irritably, meaning, as I later learned: "Eight thousand snakes!"

I dropped the keg, grabbed the other loaded gun that was swung from my shoulder, and, with this in readiness, stood to receive them.

As the leader approached I had the barrel of the matchlock pointed at his breast. This would have made any civilized man throw up his hands and cry for quarter, but it meant nothing to him. Swiftly I concluded that if I shot him or shot idly at nothing it would not demoralize these people who walked with pride and energy and dignity, in bold contrast to the decadent Yucatans of Toltepec, dwelling primitively on the fringes of a glorious antiquity. I did not think the sound of the gun, or even the death of one of them by it, would make worshippers of them.

"Señor, I surrender!" I said, lowering the matchlock.

He stopped and cocked his ear a little as if the echoes of this strange Castilian tongue still sounded there and mystified him and tantalized him. But he could understand the complaisant tone, if not the words. And he gave no orders for a pair of his followers to take forcible hold of me.

He stood and watched me as did his warriors, about fifty of them. A dozen of them carried cages, in each of which was a parrot, every bird silent now.

One cage-holder, with his eyes glued on me like those of all the rest, was not aware of the boa's head descending slowly from a limb just back of him, attracted by this bright-plumaged morsel. The serpent swung there, and ever let out a little of his length, and the two parts of his scarlet tongue vibrated in discord, one bending up, the other down. Then, instantaneously, he darted his head sidewise into the cage, and, with cage and squawking bird, swung back to the limb quicker than a human hand could be withdrawn.

He was too high there for a swordsman to reach, and high enough for me to shoot safely above the heads of the men. All their eyes now followed the pointing barrel of the matchlock to where the snake, only half concealed by the foliage, was embracing cage and parrot in his enormous folds.

I shot.

Green and red feathers were the first to fall, floating and drifting in the languid air. Next the tubular body, slowly, smoothly, like a column of ropy liquid, poured seven cubits down from the limb. Then suddenly it dropped with a soft but heavy impact to the earth.

These, forsooth, were not the simple and superstitious kind of men to worship me.

"Xicuipilli coattl—eight thousand snakes," remarked the leader amiably. With a sweeping gesture, he indicated the pendant heads and that I should get rid of all of them.

I made signs that I wanted to go after the horse. He nodded his head yes and told two warriors to accompany me. I started out with the keg above my head. The warriors darted in advance of me and began to clear the route with their swords. I set down the keg.

WE trailed the sorrel for a mile to the margin of the swamp, into which he had heedlessly rushed in his fright. He had bogged down to his flanks. In a few hours more he would surely have sunk clear in. One warrior went back to report. The whole tribe came up. With their swords they cut boughs and we put these down as firm footing for the horse.

We traveled a league farther and came out upon the shores of a beautiful lake. There we camped.

The warriors took off their quilted cotton armor, three fingers thick and able to turn an arrow, and removed arm and leg guards of leather-covered wood. In groups they stacked their weapons—clubs, javelins, bows and arrows, and swords which in several instances were taken to the water and rinsed of their scarlet stains. Then they went in bathing in the lake. I was glad I had learned how to swim in the Guadalquivir so I could now join my captors, whose hair was worn long like a woman's, sometimes loose about their shoulders and getting in their eyes in the water, and sometimes in braids.

The leader was garmented and equipped like the rest, except that he had in addition a cloak

of gorgeous feather-work and a wooden helmet in the shape of an open-jawed jaguar's head, surmounted by five different-colored plumes—red, green, yellow, white, and black.

He did not join us in the public swim but went off by himself. Then he shaved and no Spanish barber ever used so many razors to take off the beard from a single face. It required fifteen blades. But, on the other hand, a warrior made keen edges on the spot as fast as he needed them. This workman had a chunk of obsidian in his lap. He pressed a piece of wood against the rim of this and flaked off blades, black and glistening, that were indeed razor-sharp at first but soon dulled.

I picked up some of the discarded flint and began sawing back and forth at a link of my leg fetter.

The leader looked at my operations curiously, questioningly. I think he had regarded the chains as some sort of prized decoration. I gestured that I certainly wanted them off. Whereupon he summoned two warriors and instructed them gutturally and in words that seemed to me unconscionably long. They began on two links, one at the ankle, the other at the wrist. After about an hour this pair were spelled by two more. They worked right on into the darkness in hourly shifts around the camp-fire, with every sign they would keep it up all night. When I became drowsy, they indicated for me to go ahead and sleep, and they could continue the filing just the same.

It must have been past midnight when I was aroused from my sleep by one of the parrot's calling out: *"Teotl, no teotl, no mahuitzik teotl Montezuma."*

The leader was waked up also, and we began to talk across the chasm of our different languages.

"Topozula," he said, pointing at himself.

"Fran—" I started out, altered it to say, "Grandee of Toltepec," and finished by declaring, *"Ixta teotl*—White god," the words being those addressed to me back there at Toltepec and turning out now to be understandable to the leader.

"Ixta ye—white man," he corrected me. My light complexion, disguised by the dark tan of my face and arms, had scarcely been noticed until I went in swimming, when my fair body had been the subject of considerable attention and comment.

Topozula pointed at several warriors. "Aztecs," he said.

I pointed at myself again. "Spaniard," I said.

And the moment I said it I could have bit my tongue. Being a Spaniard and a white god could easily seem to him not to fit together. Whether he noticed anything contradictory, I did not know, because the same parrot, after some low preliminary noises in his throat, broke out again into the solemn-toned address to Montezuma.

Whereupon, interrupting the labors of the two warriors at my wrist and ankle, I stood up and pointed south. "Montezuma?" I asked. I pointed in turn north, east, and west, each time inquiring: "Montezuma?"

Topozula went suddenly silent. I could not get another word out of him. His whole manner abruptly changed and cooled. He spoke shortly to the warrior pair, who discontinued their filing on the links. When I took up a chip of black obsidian and began filing myself, he jerked it out of my hands.

As I lay the rest of the night blanketed in my own tiger-skins there by the camp-fire, and heard the sorrel cropping the lush pasturage by the lakeside, I slept little and wondered much about this enigma of Montezuma, unable to understand how even a simple inquiry about him had been somehow a serious offense.

CHAPTER XX

LITTLE THUNDER—AND BIG

TOPOZULA, the Aztec captain, was fully six-feet-one and had buck teeth which thrust his lips out so that, in spite of being a stern man, he looked like he was always grinning—a little foolishly. He was in truth without merriment, very serious, very haughty, very melancholy. In some ways he made me think of Fonseca, though—notwithstanding I was his captive—I liked him immensely better than I did that grandee.

Topozula and his followers had a dozen parrots in cages, or did have before the boa killed one.

These were not brought along as mascots, but were plainly regarded by the warriors as perfect nuisances. All of them spoke the same adoration to Montezuma, with the same reverential accents, only they spoke it in Aztec instead of Spanish. All of them, in the midst of much gibberish I could not understand, would change into that tone I knew so well, and say the Aztec words that were equivalent to those I had first heard in the Castilian tongue at Cadiz and had last heard in gurgles out of the strangling sea when Zorilla had kicked Pico's pet overboard: "Lord, my lord, my great lord Montezuma."

These Aztec words were: *"Teotl, no teotl, no mahuitzik teotl Montezuma."*

During the following weeks, as I wandered with the Aztecs from native settlement to native settlement, I saw that the parrots were being left among the Yucatan tribes as heralds of the greatness and power and magnificence of Montezuma. One bird remained permanently

with each tribe. Its purpose there, several times a day, through all the years it lived, was to proclaim the grandeur of the Aztec monarch—for I soon learned he was a man and not a god. The parrots were trained to say these reverent words and were then distributed far and wide to repeat them interminably to the tribesmen, and it was somehow specially impressive for a bird thus to declare Montezuma's glory.

It was common enough for a king to be pictured on coins, so the people couldn't earn any money or spend any without having him brought to mind, but I had never before heard of a sovereign who went to such lengths as this. Yet I had to admit it was a better reminder than a face on a *castellano* or doubloon. The parrots could always be counted on, they liked to say the same thing over and over, and they lived a hundred years.

Whenever a tribe was subdued, a bird was left among them, and one of the natives was appointed with much ceremony as State Keeper of the Parrot. Then a pattern was set of what the people themselves were supposed to do at least once every day the rest of their lives. At each noon hour, Topozula and his men turned their faces toward the west, bowed so low that their foreheads touched the ground, and as they bowed they said in concert in the words and solemn cadences of the parrot: *"Teotl, no teotl, no mahuitzik teotl Montezuma."*

The natives were made to do the same. Only they were permitted to use their own language instead of that of the Aztecs. They rehearsed it, and did it over and over under the relentless drilling of Topozula, until it was performed with some degree of grace and naturalness, and particularly until the chant from these rude throats had a proper tone of respect and reverence.

Sometimes the tribal parrot would speak out in advance as if in example for them to follow, sometimes right after they finished in an echoing refrain, and sometimes would keep silent in spite of the coaxings of the new keeper, or spit out short exclamatory terms that I knew not the meaning of but suspected to be mild Aztec oaths which the disgusted warriors had taught it.

The first time the Aztecs abased themselves to their great and distant lord, I stood unbowing, just as I had done on the Cadiz wharf when Fonseca approached us at the cannon. And just as Fonseca made me bow then, so Topozula now motioned that my forehead was to go to the earth—all the way to it—and that my lips were to venerate Montezuma.

I shook my head no.

He shook his yes.

"Listen to me," I told him. "I am *Ixta teotl*—the White god—and a god does not bow to a human lord, does not speak words of homage to him."

He looked at me sternly, once more motioning that my forehead was to touch the dust.

I looked straight back at him, with unwavering eyes, being on my part as stern as I could, and again shook my head no.

He signalled two men with javelins. The sharp obsidian points of these weapons touched my sides and tickled my ribs through my garments.

This time, when he indicated what I was to do, perforce I did it, saying as I lifted my head from its full descent to the earth: *"Teotl, no teotl, no mahuitzik teotl Montezuma!"*

I spoke not in Spanish but in Aztec. They were pleased at this, but what pleased them still more was the perfect tone I gave it—the way I uttered every solemn syllable exactly as it should be. And, after all, it was not surprising that I should be able to mimic those worshipful accents and to mimic them precisely, for, by Lucifer's Adam's apple, I had heard them often enough.

This episode put me so much in their good graces that I was given one of the parrots. Immediately I planned how I would change his language into Spanish and give him to Pico. Then I became sad, so sad that Topozula thought I was not pleased with the gift. He reached out his hand to take back the cage; I held on to it.

"I want him, sir," I said. "For a moment I pictured myself giving him to a friend who would rather have him than any other gift in the world. I am sad because I will never see this friend again. But I want the bird."

At last the time came when we had only two parrots left, one besides mine who little by little was being given the selfsame vocabulary as Pico's bird, including the *carramba's* and *el diablos.*

WE headed toward the west. The Aztecs were about through with their mission and had only one bird to leave, but delivery of it took on unusual importance.

Topozula, dropping his assured manner, became nervous and apprehensive. His warriors carried their bows, clubs, javelins and two-edged swords in readiness to use upon the instant.

I learned that we were approaching a tribe who did not have the cringing souls of slaves like the other natives we had visited, but moved with the pride of manhood and breathed with the spirit of freedom.

"Scultecs are bad men," observed Topozula. "Very bad men."

He told me these people had been subdued a few months previously but had become unsubdued before the Aztecs were out of sight.

They had bowed to the dust, chanted adoration to Montezuma, and in all ways had pretended to knuckle down. Then, just as soon as the Aztecs had crossed to the other side of the river, the Scultecs lined up along the bank in scornful discard of what they had done. The voice of the parrot came across the width of the stream to the Aztecs. The bird was allowed to get halfway through the exaltation of Montezuma when the appointed keeper reached a hand into the cage. His fingers closed upon and crushed the parrot's throat and choked the solemn words off abortively so that they ended in a death squawk.

The Aztecs had not returned until now to avenge the insult and make the Scultecs submit.

Because of these rebels, Topozula was glad to have the horse and me along. Always the other natives had quickly thought me the white god, and the Aztec captain had let them think it, since it made his work easier. When I approached a settlement on horseback, they regarded the animal and me as a single creature, a kind of double-headed centaur.

"Scultecs are bad men," repeated Topozula. "Insult Aztecs."

"Then," I suggested, "let's go past them a league to the east or west or in the night so we can give them the slip."

"No, we must make them take parrot. We must conquer them and punish them, *Ixta ye*—white man."

He would never bring himself to the point of calling me *Ixta teotl*—White god, though he was willing for the natives to think me so. He addressed me by the term of White Man and nothing more up to this time. Beyond letting it partly slip out when we had first introduced ourselves, I did not tell him my name was Francisco, considering it unimpressive for a god.

"How many of them?" I asked.

"A thousand."

"And you are fifty-one."

"One Aztec worth twenty Scultecs. You will use little thunder. You will use big thunder."

"No, sir, I won't. They never did me any harm. They are not my enemies."

"Bad men, Scultecs very bad men. They do not like Montezuma. You will strike them with little thunder, you will strike them with big thunder."

"No," I insisted, "I won't fire on brave men just to make them slaves to Montezuma and the Aztecs. I might even help the Scultecs with little thunder, with big thunder."

So we talked, for by this time I could both speak and understand Aztec to a limited extent.

He motioned to two warriors, who immediately touched my sides and tickled my ribs with their javelins.

"You help Scultecs?" he demanded.

"No, *señor capitán*."

"You help Topozula?"

"Yes, sir."

We spent a day crossing a deep, sluggish stream that was about a fourth as wide as the Guadalquivir at Seville. Then we marched about two leagues and came to where a village had been burned to the ground. The Scultecs were drawn up in battle formation along the farther bank. They had spears and bows and arrows and big turtle-shell shields. Many of them were also out in the river in canoes. Topozula called to them to surrender. The response was a great warwhoop.

"You see," said Topozula, "bad, insulting men. Set up big thunder on bank."

"But shouldn't I first appear on horseback. In the white robe, I will ride slowly along the bank and back again so they will consider me the white god and maybe surrender."

He did not say anything, but I thought he favored this procedure, which was the one we usually followed. Out of sight of the Scultecs, I picked up the bundle wherein was tied the white robe taken from the dead Spaniard.

Topozula grabbed the garment out of my hand and tied it up in its bundle again.

"Use big thunder," he ordered.

I understood. He did not want to give the scornful Scultecs a harmless intimidation. He wanted to give them our worst medicine at once.

Back from the burned part of the village, the warriors found a considerable number of logs. These were carried down to the edge of the water wherewith to make rafts for crossing over and assaulting this arrogant army. One specially big float was constructed. The captain explained that this was for the cannon-loaded horse and me from such a bobbing platform out in the middle of the stream I was to bombard the native fighters up there on the bank. I could see how this might end in dumping the horse and the cannon and the unwilling cannoneer all into the river.

Until this was ready to transport us or drown us, I kept the sorrel's flanks and the cannon's tube pointed from our bank toward the line-up of natives on the opposite bank.

IT surprised me that the large number of enemy canoes allowed the Aztecs to work at the logs unmolested. They waited until the rafts were about ready to be launched. Then, with another loud warwhoop, they rapidly closed in. Each Scultec, except the rowers, held not spears, nor bows, nor slings, nor any such familiar weapons. Each held gourds or pumpkins in both hands. They threw these vegetables as a player would throw a ball.

When the yellow bulks landed on the rafts they broke into pieces and released swarms of

hornets and wasps and other fierce insects.

The gourds and pumpkins had simply been hollowed out to thin rinds. In them the insects had been shut up until they were hungry and savage. As soon as they were set free by the crashing vegetables, they attacked and stung viciously, a dozen or a score to each of the Aztecs. The latter lost all interest in the rafts, in crossing the stream, in subduing the Sculptecs. They only wanted to get clear away from there.

As for the sorrel and me, we fared the same as the rest. I was interrupted in the very act of firing the cannon. A rather long fuse had already been lighted and was slowly burning toward the gunpowder. I was at the horse's head, keeping him steady, aiming at where the chief and his principal men were congregated on the other side. One of the canoes came up very daringly in front of me. Four men threw as many vegetables and then quickly four more. These landed and shattered close around me so that the hornets attacked me, and particularly the horse, in full force.

Before I could put out the fuse or jerk it off, the sorrel gave a jump and broke loose from me. I was alarmed for our own men, because the horse, instead of heeling it away into the woods, simply ran around in a circle in his panic and his pain, and we never knew where the cannon was going to shoot, only that it was going to shoot very soon.

The fire traveled along the fuse; the animal revolved; the big gun was touch-and-go in its pointing. A man could fight the insects better standing, but he was then in range to have his head blown off. So we flattened ourselves like Moors at prayer.

It turned out to be a boomerang for the natives. The cannon went off while the horse was headed away from the bank so that the ball hit a canoe in midstream and broke it in two. The occupants were not killed but all were catapulted into the water.

I grabbed the horse, called to a warrior to hold him steady, while I reloaded with a specially heavy charge of gunpowder. As soon as I was ready to fire again, I took out the white robe and put it on, without giving the captain a chance to say yea or nay. Then I walked to the very edge of the bank, held out my right arm straight and imperiously, and called to them in Aztec to surrender.

They did nothing of the sort, but at least they did not let out a warwhoop.

I picked up the two matchlocks, one under each arm, and walked down the bank. I stepped out upon a raft partly pulled up at that place. I asked two warriors to pole me across toward the enemy. Halfway over, I held out my right arm straight and imperiously again. Then I aimed at a canoe just below the water line. It filled with water and sank. Two of the turtle-

The sorrel ran around in a circle in his panic and pain as the hornets swarmed about him.

shell shields were leaning against a stump off to one side where it was safe to shoot. I put a big hole through one of them. I stretched out my right arm a third time, straight and imperiously, and held it in that posture while the two warriors poled me back to our side.

I climbed the bank, took up my position at the cannon, then stepped to the horse's front to aim it.

"*Señor capitán,*" I said to Topozula, "this is murder and I have no stomach for it. Why not leave them? They won't stay subdued—they

won't ever stay subdued. And why should they away off on this river, pay homage to Montezuma away off somewhere else?"

"Must use the big thunder," said Topozula.

He explained that if we left any tribe unconquered the great Montezuma would have his—Topozula's—heart cut out and placed still warm and throbbing on an Aztec altar.

I aimed the cannon but I did not aim it at anyone of the brave, obdurate men on the other side. In my heart I hoped they would remain unconquered. I took hold of the horse that had now recovered from his scare but was inflamed and lumpy from the insect stings. I placed him where I wanted him and then gave his head back to the warrior.

I lighted the fuse.

It went off with a tremendous explosion, indeed like thunder, though there was not a cloud in the sky. I had aimed at a campfire off to the right. The burning sticks jumped and were tossed about, and some fell sizzling into the stream.

I walked yet again to the bank to hold out my right arm in that commanding gesture I had used thrice aforetimes.

But there was no need. The natives, several hundred of them facing me, stooped down until their foreheads touched the ground, and gave that reverent testimony to Montezuma.

"They must have the parrot," said Topozula.

"I will take the bird to them," I offered.

REPEATEDLY I asked Topozula to take me to the great Montezuma. As repeatedly he refused. He said if he took me there, my heart would be cut out and laid still warm and heating on the green sacrifice stone.

"I am a god myself," I told him, as I had often told him before. "Montezuma cannot cut out the white god's heart to sacrifice to lesser Aztec gods."

He half believed, half doubted, and this placed him between the devil and the deep blue sea. If a god, I was to be treated well but all the more to be kept away from Montezuma.

I had wormed it out of a warrior, a big, simple fellow by the name of Nochix, that the Aztecs once had a white god and he was due to return some day. If anyone with a fair skin showed up in the remotest edges of Aztec territory, it made Montezuma uneasy and afraid, for the white god's coming would spell his end.

The Spanish Inquisition and Fonseca and the king had fearfully thought Montezuma might be a western god. And now Montezuma fearfully thought I might be a white god from Spain. Aztecs and Spaniards were mightily suspicious of each other's gods, and poor Francisco bore the brunt of it coming and going.

There had been a good deal of guile in Topozula. Day after day he had urged me to fire the cannon at the slightest pretext. At first I thought the reason was his childish delight in its thunder. I soon saw he was craftily trying to get me to squander the gunpowder.

Nevertheless, I had used it sparingly.

Then one morning the keg of sulphur was missing. Not one of the kegs of saltpetre, not the keg of charcoal, just this cask of precious brimstone.

In Topozula's mind, my power came from the cannon and matchlocks. Their power, in turn, came from being fed with the gunpowder. And this, finally, must have a mixture of the yellow sulphur in order to be powerful.

He was so close to being right that, without this ingredient, there was now left me in the two panther-skin pouches as my total supply of gunpowder only enough of the ready-mixed for a single cannon charge, and for possibly a half dozen shots of the matchlocks.

When I accused Topozula of deliberately having his men destroy the sulphur, he looked very hurt that I should think such a thing of him. I mounted the sorrel and rode all about the neighborhood of our camping-place. A half-league off, near the river bank, I found the water-logged keg. The head had been caved in, probably by heavy stones. The oak stave with *B. Cruz, Cadiz* burned into it, was broken in two. That name, and the pompous fat man it conjured up, transported me for a moment from my degenerate plight back to the gunpowder factory in fair Cadiz.

I brought the keg back with me, both as evidence and to be used as a water cask.

Topozula put as much distress on his face as mine held, and the warriors stood about sadly with downcast eyes.

"You guilty rascals!" I cried. "I would indeed look down. You knaves and hypocrites!"

By this time I knew much Aztec but they still knew no Spanish. So they did not understand anything except from my tone and stern visage that I was upset and angry over the loss of the sulphur.

At the end of my condemning speech, Topozula stood up very straight, very tall, very solemn, and pointed his long right arm toward the west where, many leagues away, a great snow peak lifted its powdered summit far up toward the azure skies. I had never beheld such a lofty bulk of earth before. Even the shining pinnacles rimming the fair Valley of Granada, and frosted with eternal ice, did not rise up and up, and ever ascend, and approach so close to the canopy of heaven as did this mountain of such aloof majesty and beckoning magic and somnolent mystery—and of such a restorative coolness transmitted to the spirit, and taking away its fevers, across that far distance.

"Yellow dust there," he said. "Much yellow

dust at smoking mountain—Popocatepetl. We take you there. You find much." He lifted up the empty cask. "*Xiquipilli*—eight thousand kegs of yellow dust you find at Popocatepetl."

"I don't need eight thousand, Señor Topozula," I answered, in better humor. "Only one. Not enough saltpetre and charcoal to mix with any more than that. We can make more charcoal but not saltpetre. We'll use this same keg," I declared. "We can tie a skin tight over the broken end like the head of a drum."

CHAPTER XXI

THE MOUNTAIN AND THE ABYSS

DAY after day we marched inland. Topozula went ahead. I walked at his heels. The horse was behind me, with a much lighter load than when we left Toltepec, for a good deal of his baggage had been transferred to human backs.

The fifty warriors, in single file and about two cubits apart, never lost any springiness of step from sunup to nightfall, but at midday they became very warm in their quilted cotton armor, and threw back from over their eyes their long hair all drenched with sweat. The water keg was passed from mouth to mouth while they marched.

Topozula and I did much talking as we traveled, since, as I have said, I had picked up enough Aztec both to understand and be understood pretty well. I never imagined that any language in the world could have words so outrageously long—piling syllable upon syllable until you had to hold your breath a long time for such a jawbreaker as the one meaning a very white tortilla: *"Totanquitlaxcallitlatquelpacholli."* The letters *b, r, f, r, g, s* were missing. Z was like *s*. The pronunciation was low and guttural but not nasal, and the absence of *s*, of course, did away with any sibilant, whistling effect. I doubt, forsooth, whether they were able to whistle; I never heard them. When a warrior spoke my name he said: "Huancizco Pelez."

But the r's and all the rest did not trouble my parrot—the only one left of the original twelve, ten of which were now calling Montezuma a great lord among as many tribes. My bird was learning Spanish rapidly and with gusto; and to my ears the Castilian words, even from that raucous throat, were soft as spray and very companionable. In addition to the whole assortment of mouthings of Pico's bird, I taught him to say the Aztec captain's name.

Maybe at midnight or two o'clock in the morning, when he was dead to the world and no doubt dreaming delicious Aztec dreams, the parrot might scream out as natural as life: "Señor Topozula!"

The captain would bounce to a sitting position or even wholly to his feet. Then realizing what it was, he would throw something with good-naturedly poor aim at the cage, from which would come: "Silence yourself, you dirty-bearded Spaniard."

I, also awake now, would laugh uproariously, and Topozula, not understanding what had been said, would look sold-out and perplexed. The beard insult, for the delectation of Pico if I ever saw him again, did not, of course, apply in the least to Topozula, who not only was not a Spaniard but who fastidiously every evening before he went to bed would still scrape his face smooth with fifteen razors, more or less.

As we came nearer to the mountain, I thought how puny was I, claiming to the Aztecs to be a god. Ourselves and all things else seemed small. It rose up more than three miles high and appeared indeed almost to pierce the blue dome of the firmament.

We camped at the foot and prepared for the climb.

"Cavallo stay here," said Topozula.

"No, *Señor capitán*, old Caballo, the horse, goes right up with us."

The animal had his load still further lightened, so that he carried only the cannon, with the five gold bars swinging by stout thongs from the tube.

For about half a league we traveled upward through a changing forest. On the lower slopes, the timber was of pines strewing the ground with cones a foot long, and of oaks that shed their leaves, and of shrubs and other trees I had never seen in Spain. Then we came into a region delighting the nostrils with the balm of unfamiliar evergreens that bled a sticky sap when I broke off branches. Here also was a kind of oak that did not drop its leaves. Still farther up we reached a district of huge pines, with foliage in ceaseless motion under the strong wind and in lofty tracery against the sky. These lasted to the upper timber line, beyond which the vegetation thinned to a few flowering plants and grass tussocks—and then could climb no higher.

Among these rocking pines we camped. Among them we left the horse when, before dawn the next morning, we began to conquer the final mile.

THE parrot would certainly be only excess baggage on the way to the summit and, for all his feathers, might perish in the cold. My special warrior friend, Nochix, climbed up to a limb fully thirty feet above the ground and tied the cage so it hung down farther than any animal's paw could reach. It would swing back and forth there in the strong blowing but the bird would be safe while we were gone.

A hundred steps and a hundred cubits above

the woods, steeply upward through the lava fields, and I felt already a longing to rest. I did so, and with me the big, strong Aztecs, unashamed. The wind on these barren heights blew with the force of a gale and cut like a knife, peppering our faces with the loose lava dust into which our feet were swallowed to the ankles.

The four warriors who carried the cannon, and the eight upon whose shoulders rested a thirty-foot tree trunk, wanted to throw these burdens down and leave them there in the volcanic ashes. Topozula merely ordered a dozen others to the task. Their complaints caused a shift to yet twelve others, and to a third group, and a fourth, and back to the first again until the wailing ceased.

When daylight came upon us at that two-and-a-half-mile elevation, I looked out over a large plain almost as much like paradise as Granada's. Six lakes flashed under the morning sun and I saw indistinctly what looked like a town of immense size, to which I pointed, saying: "Montezuma's city?"

"Montezuma long way off," replied Topozula evasively.

"I know, Señor Topozula," I answered, "but there he is."

I fingered two of the five gold bars tied to the cannon tube.

"Much gold," I said. "A gift for Montezuma when I visit him."

He wrinkled his mouth in scorn, as much as his protruding teeth would let him.

"Poor man's gold," he declared, "poor man's gift. Great Montezuma would toss it to a servant as soon as your back was turned. He has rooms full of gold."

Just the same, I thought, *no more than I have back there at Toltepec.*

Topozula, cutting short the talk, began to toil upward a few more cubits, I at his heels.

I could not penetrate the secretiveness of Topozula, but I managed to be alone with big, simple Nochix.

I indicated the basin floor spreading out so far below us.

"The Valley of Mexico?" I asked.

"Yez, Huancizco Pelez, it iz home—the Plateau of Anahuac."

I pointed to the biggest of the six lakes amidst which shone what I took to be the buildings and temples and palaces and pyramids of a vast metropolis.

"Montezuma city?" I queried.

Although it was not the time of day to do so, he uttered the adoration to the Aztec emperor and bowed toward that shining capital, having much ado to touch his head to the ground because we faced down the slope.

Topozula shouted: "*Tihui*, Nochix! *Tihui!* On your way, Nochix, on your way!"

But I had received answer enough.

Occasionally we were enveloped in clouds. Sometimes these were below us but oftener above.

The loose lava changed to frozen lava and this to frozen snow. The solid crust of this was slippery. Every ten steps we rested for five minutes—that is, we began to do this but Topozula had a different notion.

"Go ten steps and one minute rest," was his edict. "Go fifteen and three minutes. Go twenty and five minutes."

We usually managed to put one foot upward in front of the other a score of times for the greater reward. So the wily captain got out of us just twice the distance for the same rest period. But then and there he ordered a heavy piece of baggage to be set down.

"Leave big thunder," he commanded. "One little thunder enough."

At last, while we were in the midst of a thick fog, Topozula reached out, grabbed my arm, and stopped me. We stood there until the thick shroud separated, blew away, and disappeared.

Then I saw where another step would have taken me. I looked down into a caldron, an abyss, a chasm, one thousand feet deep. The Seville Cathedral, the second largest church in all the world, could have been dropped into this stupendous excavation and the tip of the spire would have still been far, far below us. But the crater was not a thousand feet deep everywhere. In some places it was half again as much. In other places it was only six or seven hundred feet. The rim was irregular and rose and dipped.

Up and down, its shape was not like the half of an orange but more like that of a bell or the crown of a hat. From left to right, it was not scooped out as a circle but as an ellipse or an egg, twice as far one way as the other from yawning bank to yawning bank.

The upper surface of the walls went down almost vertically. Protruding stones and ledges and flat places farther down, were incrusted with snow and sulphur. And the bottom of that giant pot was yellow all over with sulphur, some of which was steaming out as we stood there.

Two noises ever came to our ears. One was the hiss of this molten chemical smelted in deep-buried fires and escaping through vents in the crater floor. The other was like fifty matchlocks in constant fusillade—rocks dislodging and falling down from the sides to the brimstone bottom.

THE baggage had included all the rawhide rope that could be put into a large basket, all that could be crowded into the empty keg, and six or seven separate cables which the warriors had wound around their waists

for convenient carrying. It was enough altogether to make a double length that would reach to the bed of the chasm, not here where we stood, not at other high places, but off to the left about three hundred cubits. There the rim was broken by a width of about two hundred feet, with sheer drops on either side. At the bottom was a trough which was filled with a glacier. We observed other low places, but this seemed to be the most desirable.

In order to get to it, we had to go back down the slope a distance and walk up the glacier between the sheer walls. The ice was cut up by crevasses, deep but short, none of them extending clear across, so we were able to make our way around them.

The thirty-foot pole was shoved out fifteen feet beyond the brink. The half that lay upon the glacier was anchored with a pile of big boulders.

All the lengths of rope were tied together. One end was fastened to the handle of the basket which contained me along with the ammunition pouches at my sides, the matchlock that I thought just as well to have with me, and the empty keg that was to be used for holding the sulphur. The free end of the rope was tied to the pole stretching out from the caldron edge like a bowsprit of a ship. This was to prevent it from escaping through any accident of handling.

The rest of the long cable was coiled near the rim to be let out as needed. A short length of the basket end of the rope was looped over the projecting beam, about ten feet from the rim, to keep me from colliding with the walls. A cross-bar had been fastened to the outward end so that if the pole bent a little the loop would not slide off.

I hung suspended there for a minute or two, with Nochix astraddle of the pole close at hand, so close that I could reach up and touch his sandaled feet—and I did take hold of them momentarily while I adjusted my balance in the basket.

Then I began to let myself down, at first inch by inch, but soon gaining confidence and increasing the speed of my descent. Nochix had slid back to the bank, and the pole scarcely swayed or bent from my weight and that of my equipment.

When I was about one hundred feet down, I stopped. I found I was very tense and my breath shortened at any kind of exertion in that thin atmosphere. I was going down but into a pit the bottom of which was still more than three miles high. As I hung there, I gazed across to the far side about a half-mile distant and to the left and the right where the curving surfaces stretched away from me. Then I looked up and saw those fifty faces peering down at me all along the rim, their long hair hanging down in front or blown back by the wind, and Topozula's five plumes flapping so wildly I thought they would be whipped off and blown away.

"Is Huancizco all light?" Nochix called down. "Doz hiz head zwim? Iz he dizzy?"

"All right," I said, lowering myself two hundred, three hundred feet more before I stopped again.

The black walls were now all around me, spotted with white snow and yellow sulphur. More loudly came to my ears the two continous noises of the crater—the escaping steam at the bottom and the falling stones.

Once more I looked upward and once more I saw Topozula and the warriors peering over the rim at me—all but one. That one was Nochix, my friend. He was astride the projecting pole, sliding out toward the loop of the rope with a knife in his hand.

I had had no occasion to mistrust these men, certainly not to mistrust them up to the point of what I now observed with a cold tingling of fear from feet to crown.

Since both my hands were required to handle the rope, I had slung the matchlock from my shoulder. I still must hold onto the looped part of the cable or otherwise fasten it, to keep from hurtling down to the bottom. Even if I risked gripping it with one hand, the other was not enough for maneuvering that heavy matchlock, much less to shoot it straight up. I tied the looped part to the basket handle with a secure knot. Then squatting in the basket to be steadier, and also not standing lest the kick of the gun throw me out, I aimed.

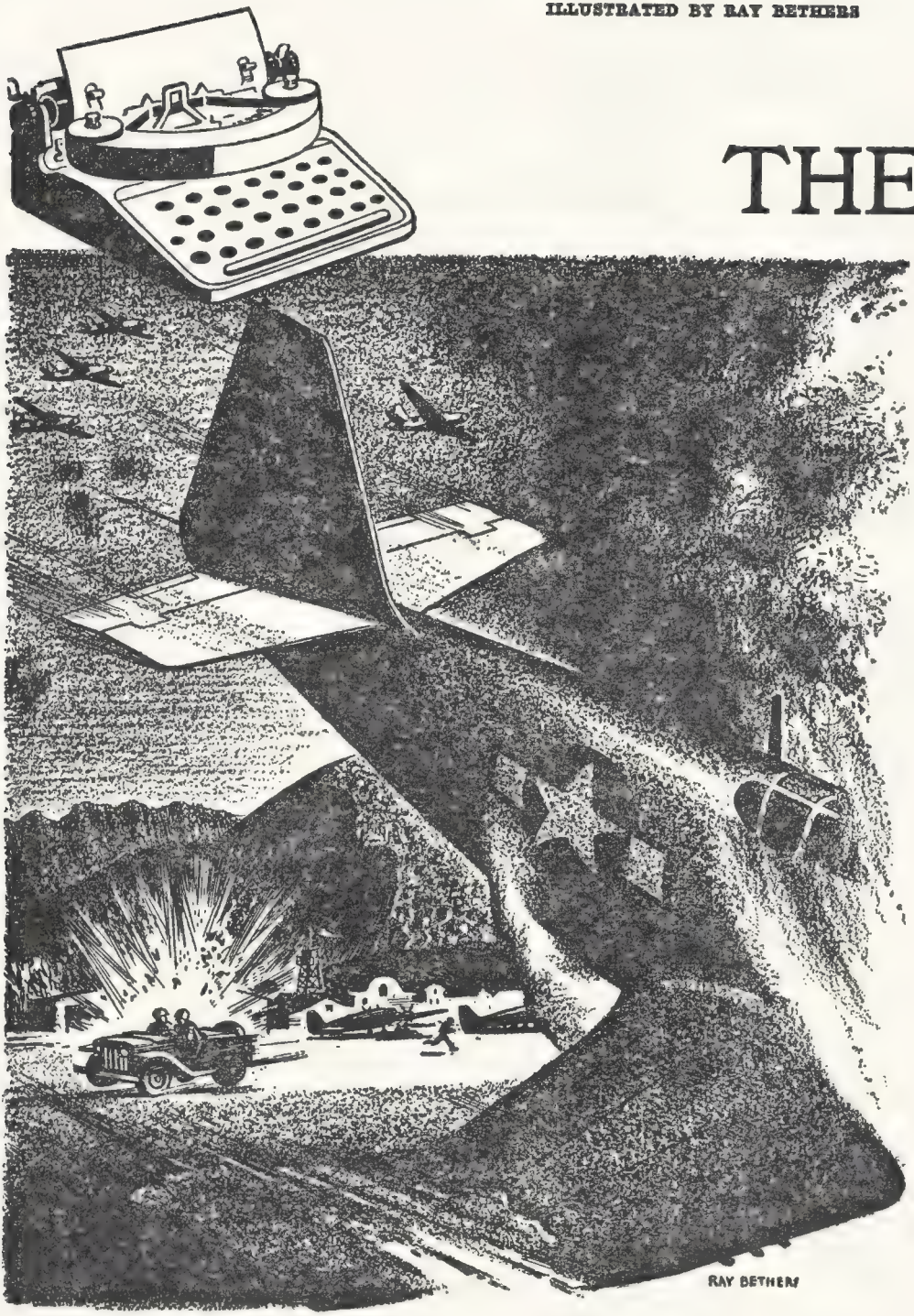
When he looked down that three hundred feet, Nochix gazed exactly into the bore of the matchlock muzzle.

"Stop or you will die!" I shouted.

(To Be Concluded)

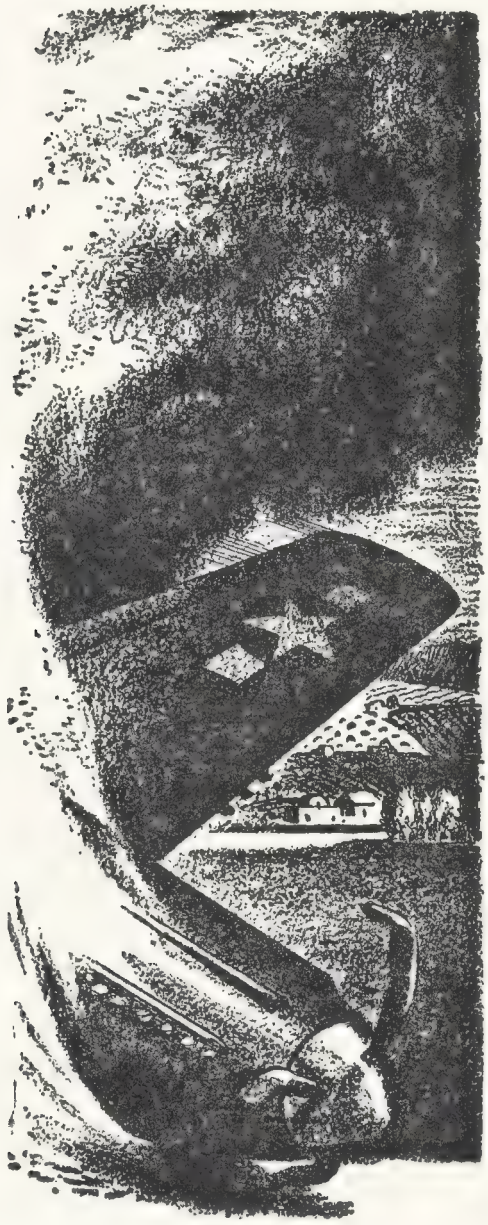
ILLUSTRATED BY RAY BETHERS

THE



Out of the corner of an eye, I could see it stack up and go, a garish burst of flame and pluming smoke in the sunlit afternoon.

KUNMING STORY



THIS war correspondent and I were sitting there, watching the planes shuttle on and off Kunming Airport. It was somnolent noontime, and beyond the green cultivated fields that bordered the lake, we could see the slaty-blue mountains thrusting upward toward Burma. I wasn't doing a notoriously good job of listening because this correspondent, like most of them, was a fabulous liar. Their stuff is so emasculated by the censors, I suppose, that they cannot refrain from unloading on defenseless bystanders. When they talked, you got a splendid full-length portrait of themselves plus just a soupçon of war's violence, like the little river that flows perpetually back of Mona Lisa's shoulder.

This one was dark and intense, in a rumpled uniform with dark green epaulettes. His mouth was stamped with weariness, and his eyes wore sooty dark shadows. It would have been normal to suppose that those eyes were darkened by having seen the tumult and the fury. As it happened, I could smell the rice wine wafting out of his pores, and I knew he had been watching the fog roll in (with two majors and a bevy of Oriental coryphees) at the United Nations Club, downtown. Flash! Anyway, he was talking, and he by no means despised the sound of his own voice. So I listened, since it was all I could do.

When the Chinese mechanics dropped their tools and started running, I quit listening. I started running, too. I am one who does not need to be poked in the eye with a sharp stick, and I knew that the red air raid warning balls had been hoisted in the Jing Pao tree. As I ran, the whole field went crazy, like a movie cartoon out of control. People were running, planes were taking off and landing with a monumental disregard for safety, and motor vehicles were lurching wildly down the dusty road toward town.

I had nearly reached my favorite slit trench

By
JAMES ATLEE
PHILLIPS

when I heard the sound. It was a faint humming, waspish and unbalanced, the unmistakable, unsynchronized thunder of Nip engines. The fighters were taking off *whumm, whumm, whumm,* trying to get upstairs in time. The motor quit on one of them, and the little monoplane went skidding off the end of the runway. Out of the corner of an eye, I could see it stack up and go, a garish burst of flame and pluming smoke in the sunlit afternoon. The thunder above was growing more audible; it pulsed in, pounding waves of sound. I made a long hook slide into the slit trench that would have made Pepper Martin cry with envy, like a child. Then I scrambled under the little concrete bridge and waited.

The first sound I heard was that of the correspondent. He came in by me and sat down. It sounds unbelievable, but he was still talking. About how many planes the Nips had over the field, what they would do in the way of damage, and why they didn't carry anything heavier than 500-pounders. I sighed, lighted a cigarette, and gave him one. Since I had been in China for four years, part of that time with the A.V.G., and he had been in Cathay for three months, counting travel time, I sighed again and listened. For I knew that the Mitsis would make a run over and then come back for the bomb run. Also, from the way the fighters were snarling, I knew they didn't have time enough to get up to the Nips. So I waited.

The correspondent fixed me with that beady eye, that lecture stare. "Who," he asked suddenly, "is the youngest general in the United States Army?"

"Barney Gillman." Up above, the Jap bombers were turning. Must be more than twenty of them, I thought. Hold your hats, girls!

The latter-day Ancient Mariner of Acme Press nodded, as though he knew something wonderful. "Exactly," he said. He fluttered his hands deprecatingly, in the gloom under the little bridge. "In our business," he said, "we run into the damnedest things . . ." And then, while we waited for the armada overhead to spawn out its violence, he began the story about Barney Gillman. It was interrupted, naturally, by the bombing raid, but he never let up. When the thunder of the eggs struck the field, he just moved in and started howling all the louder. (Two years later, the same story appeared as Chapter 17 of his book, *Hitching A Ride With Destiny.*)

"BARNEY GILLMAN," said my crouching soothsayer, "was a cowhand in Monohans, Texas, in 1939. We know him now, at twenty-seven, as the youngest general officer in our army, but then he was a saddle-sprung, slow-talking boy of twenty-two. He knew early, with the simple wisdom of the plains people, that the nation stood in peril, and forsook the staked plains to enlist in the U. S. Army. His first assignment, as buck private, was to Camp Scarborough, in Georgia.

"Gillman didn't know," whispered my little Svengali, "that Scarborough was a camp for training war dogs. He came into the camp, reported, walked outside toward his quarters, and was badly bitten by one of the trainees. Standing there on the parade ground, far from home, the young soldier was slashed below the hip pockets, repeatedly, by a Boxer dog named Bearkat.

"Can't you see it?" asked the correspondent, supplicating with upward palms. "This young westerner in khaki, signing up to fight for four, five, or any number of freedoms. Incontinently thrust out from his ranch home, and assigned to the care and feeding of war dogs. And then, to be badly bitten before he'd been on the post for ten minutes."

"That's a fact," I said idly. "A bad deal." It was almost time now.

"But not all," he said, jabbing me with an urgent forefinger. "The worst is yet to come," he said.

It was. The first salvo hit; there was that *crump, crump, crump* nearly in unison. The earth shook and the bright sunlight shook, like a newsreel gone wavering out of focus. The repercussion lashed at the field; it sent little torrents of dirt running down to join us in the trench.

"Fact!" he said. "The dog was Bearkat Invader of Palo Pinto, and around his neck were strung the chevrons of a corporal. To Gillman," said my grown-up police reporter, "this was more than an anathema. It was the ultimate cup of acid to a hot-blooded Texan. He had not only been assaulted, within safe continental limits, by a dog with a preposterous name, but the vicious canine outranked him! In deep humiliation, the private turned and ran like a spotted ape to the safety of the nearest barracks, with Bearkat nipping at him at every odd lunge with deep satisfaction and considerable teeth.

"There was some justification," said my Scheherazade of the slit trench, "for such action. After all the dog was a corporal, properly appointed, in the K9 Corps, and the ways of corporals with privates are legend. The book says you salute the rank, not the man. (Or the dog.) But so contrary are the reactions of Texans, and possibly so sensitive their posteriors, that an historic enmity was born that day between Private Gillman and Corporal Bearkat Invader of Palo Pinto. Now you and I know, being balanced people, that such matters of rank given to dogs are only a part of Army publicity campaigns. But Texans, while like Americans in many ways, depart in some particulars. In this one," said the correspondent, "an indomitable will was forged."

The bombs had been dropping for some minutes now. Part of the time, I was not able to understand even the shoutings of the correspondent, and in these moments of blessed chaos, I figured that the third wave had come over. Cautiously, I arose and looked over the edge of the slit trench. Most of all, I feared that the Zeros might come down to strafe, but there didn't seem to be any, so I clambered out and started walking back across the field. The poor people's Villon was right back of me, and still going on with the biography of General Gillman. The field was churned up considerably; as usual, the Nips had hit with most of the load, and a long line of transports was sagging and riddled.

"He was at Camp Scarborough for three months," said the voice of Circe in my ear. "He was teaching these dogs, but he was studying, too. He was applying for transfers—to anything. Bearkat bit him three more times, and he applied for the Medics, as a panhandler. He even sent a wistful little note to the Salvation Army, asking if he could beat that big drum. Oh, he hated that brown dog! He was diligent, and saluted hard enough to break an arm. He sweated, and finally they made him a corporal. On that same day, the Bearkat was posted as buck sergeant and got his third stripe."

BY THE time these heartbreaking promotions occurred, we were back in the office. I sank down, considerably tightened up, and lighted another cigarette. I guess you'll think I'm just a silly old frump, but I still don't enjoy air raids, no matter what your neighborhood theater is showing this week. I've seen a lot of raids but have never learned to bare my teeth like Victor McLaglen, because they scare hell out of me. My raconteur accepted another cigarette, which were worth about twenty cents apiece in China, and went on with his story.

"Gillman finally got his transfer," it says here in the small print. "He went to the Air Corps. He got away from (as *Time* would have it) sleek, bullet-bodied, able canine Bearkat. But the memory remained fresh and repugnant. He went into the Air Corps, as a cadet. He forfeited his rank by doing so, but at least he was among friends. Because they were all Texans in the Air Corps, with an unnoticed sprinkling of midwesterners. (It was not until they started accepting aviation cadets from the eastern seaboard states, late in '41, that many people learned that the requirements had been lowered.)

"Gillman was still thrusting around the stick of an AT6 when he saw in the newspapers that Bearkat had gone overseas. The story was a good one, aimed at increasing the K9 Corps. It showed Bearkat in his natural habitat, on a bench at the Westminster show, best of class and breed, and then it showed him at the P.O.E. with a khaki coat on his sturdy shoulders. He was, by now, a tech sergeant. Cadet Gillman, who had expected to see a lot of Betty Grable ineffectually encompassed by a gee string when he bought the Sunday supplement, was sickened and discouraged beyond belief. Because the chunky dog had come to be a nemesis in his mind. Without any warning, he went on a violent drunk—it was on a weekend, fortunately—and then he undertook his flying with a renewed vigor that was almost fanatical."

By this time, sitting in that shaded office on Kunming Airport, I was hooked. The phone rang once—a voice from China Traffic Control wanting to know if any planes had been damaged by the raid. I said, "No," and turned again, to lift my feet to the desk.

The Town Crier of the East was waiting until I had hung up the phone. "A strange tale," he said, "surpassing fiction. You follow me?"

I made a helpless, butter-churning motion with my arms, and he took up again. In desperation I remembered the bottle locked in my desk, which I'd been saving for visiting royalty or the Second Coming, and took it out. It was thirty-five-year-old Scotch. Please pronounce all the words distinctly, for we were in China. It was like blood from my veins, but we had a touch of it. He had what was almost a blow.

"Gillman was graduated," the correspondent said moodily, after swirling the priceless nectar around his mouth. The taleteller wiped about five dollars' worth of stray drops off his chin, and went on. "Gillman was assigned to fighters, and arrived in India. He bore the rank of second lieutenant, and often used to go into mirrored places to make sure of it. He was sitting in splendor in the Great Eastern Hotel in Calcutta, being mindful of his greatness over a few gimlets, when he saw a Reuters news dispatch. There was no picture, but it was graphic. Bearkat Invader of Palo Pinto had been awarded the Distinguished Service Medal for conspicuous gallantry in action. In a ruction of some violence, at the Kasserine Pass, he had led medical aid to some trapped and wounded detachments that would not otherwise have been found. For valor, he had his medal, and the commanding general was pleased to announce his promotion to captain in the tank destroyers. Bearkat wore the car tracks on his collar, and was unbelievably feted by the soldiery, said the dispatch.

"The second lieutenant read on. To everybody else who saw it, the story was a stunt. To him it was a funereal thing, and the exceedingly shapely Anglo-Indian wenches who were at the table were amazed when one of the young officers, the one who had been reading the newspaper, collapsed, sobbing, on the table. These dusky beauties were accustomed

to many things, but they had never seen an American officer cry as though his heart were broken."

WE HAD another touch of the stuff that chills and kills, myself and this correspondent with the baleful eye, and he went on. "Gillman went into Assam. He was assigned to the three hundred twenty-ninth Fighter-Bomber, and he knifed through it like a man gone mad. He made group commander; he got fourteen Nips, and was promoted to major. He quit drinking, and studied his maps. He was nuts about navigation and instruments. Only after supper, when he came back from missions, would he relax, if you can call it that. Then he read all the newspapers he could put his hands on. The commanding officer, after eighteen months of duty, was sent home, and Gillman got the nod. He worked his men like automatons, and got his silver leaf. The squadron get a Presidential Unit citation, but he could not rest. He would not rest, for one of the movie shorts forwarded so promptly to combat theaters had been concerned with Bearkat's activities in Italy. It seems that Bearkat had gone ashore with the thirty-sixth division at Salerno, had moved on with the troops after that bloody fracas, and had been awarded the Soldier's Medal and the Purple Heart. In the movie, he had been shipped home, and was there in the White House in all his splendor, while the President laughingly patted him, awarded his decorations and bestowed upon him the eagle of full colonel.

"The men of the three hundred twenty-ninth were eager-beavers. They used that heart-warmingly good stout plane called the B-25 medium and that peer of all fighters called the P-51 with the Merlin in its nose. But they could not explain, and grew somewhat resentful, about the way the Old Man, Lieutenant Colonel Gillman, drove them in the Myitkyina campaign. At the last, sitting exhausted in their officers' club, they were forced to admit they had no real legitimate beef, because Gillman flew every mission he called for. Almost, it seemed, he was intent on destroying himself. But he never did. He dived with reckless impunity, alone, on Katha, Mogaung, and Bahmo. He strafed so low that a girl scout could have picked him off with a BB rifle. To all intent, he was like the blind mule butting into the trees. He knew better, but he just didn't give a damn.

We were dry again, so the little press-association jongleur paused to take another drink. I joined him, naturally. It was growing dark on the China airport by this time, that deceptive twilight, and I could see the little tractors hauling the wrecked planes around the field. Coolies, thousands of them, were busily repairing the bomb craters. The Japanese wounds in the ancient Chinese earth would be knitted again in a few hours.

"Speak on," I said to the minnesinger, who was clearing his throat. After all that raw rice wine, his throat was unaccustomed to good Scotch.

"No more," he said, indistinctly. "The Lord will provide." Then he began to snore very gently. I reached over and shook him.

"What about the rest?" I asked.

His eyes were indistinct in the half darkness. "Nothing more," he said, with offended dignity. "He got jumped to general, that's all. Sitting behind a desk, in Delhi. . . An' the Bearkat's all washed up. Finished, *sahib*. . ."

I let him go. The match scraped as I lighted another cigarette. In the flare, he lay with his head rolled back, like a peaceful child from Indiana, sleeping quietly.

My jeep spun its wheels in the road, and I drove it very carefully. When I was inside the Chung Wau, eating that especially good sweet-and-sour pork, I saw the item. It was at the bottom of the page, plainly printed on the rough yellow paper.

> NEW YORK, September 18, (AP)—Colonel Bearkat Invader of Palo Pinto, famed Boxer war dog who has seen action in three theaters, was retired today, and returned to the Andover Kennels in Connecticut. The dog was decorated three times, twice by President Roosevelt personally, and was holder of the Purple Heart for leg wounds received at the Kasserine Pass. At the time of the official announcement, Senator Hampton Q. Futile, of Georgia, released a mimeographed statement to the press which said that Colonel Bearkat deserved well of his country. . .

While I crunched the savor out of the pork, I was eyeing the chicken-fried rice, estimating how much I could eat. The little dishes were all around me, and in my pockets I had about ten thousand Chinese dollars, which I hoped would be enough to pay for the meal.

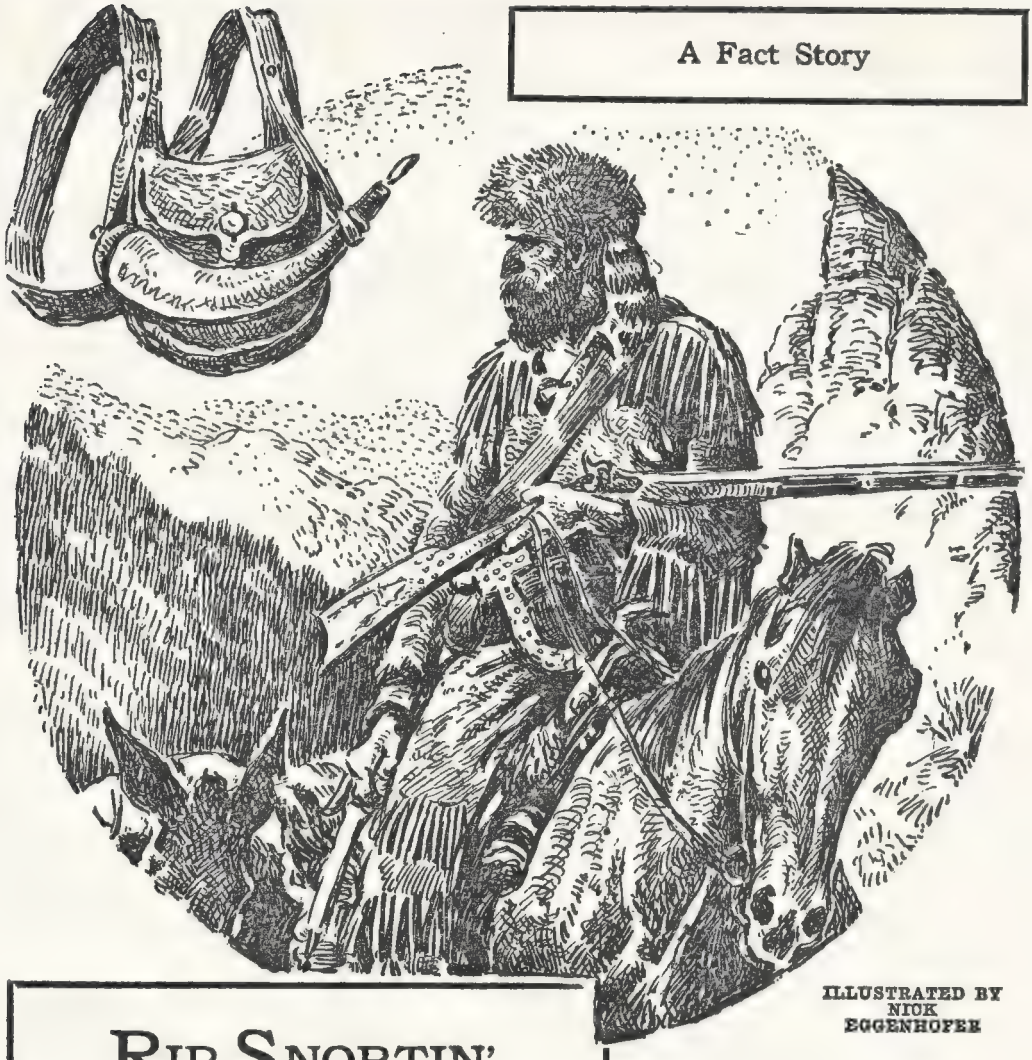
The green curtain to the booth wavered, and Raventz, a very noted foreign correspondent, came in and sat down. He had a cigarette and a drink and kept looking around cautiously.

"Have I got a thing!" he whispered, poking his head around like an amorous turkey gobbler, to see that no one was listening. "This is off the ice. This is as secret as your sister's illegitimate children."

The shark's-fin soup, which I should have eaten earlier, was superb. While I sat there, with my head throbbing like a sore toe, wolfing at the food from the little bowls, he told me about China. In that curtained booth in Kunming, we were like two foreign devils, with him dragging his knowing fingers across the heart strings of the inexplicable East.

"Tell me all about it," I said, between bites.

A Fact Story



ILLUSTRATED BY NICK EGGENHOFER

RIP-SNORTIN' MOUNTAIN MAN

By C. W. CHAMBERLAIN

Williams always rode in advance of any mounted party, his alert eyes peering from beneath his greasy coonskin cap.

LEGEND has supplied the redoubtable mountain men with numerous heroic idols, not the least of whom were Kit Carson, Jim Bridger and others. Rugged individualists all, it was difficult for these independent and cross-grained hombres to agree upon any one historic figure to compete with the fabulous Paul Bunyan. Each saw himself as the center of his universe and each attempted to outdo the others in tales of his prowess. Let the rivermen have their Mike Fink, the miners their Matty Kiely, the canteen, pick and jackass men their Shorty Harris, and the cowmen their Pecos Bill. Each mountain man liked to think of himself as equal or superior to any and all of these idols.

Strictly honest about every other matter, these stalwart sons of the peaks and canyons let their imaginations go wild when they relaxed around the campfire after a buffalo hunt, behind the stockade walls of a fort, or at their annual rendezvous in some mountain valley.

Ol' Bill Williams has come the nearest to being celebrated among the mountain men as their legendary god and unrivaled hero. He didn't have General Fremont as his press agent, as Kit Carson had, and he built no fort on the Oregon Trail so that every pilgrim became acquainted with him, as Bridger did. But among his kind, he is more celebrated and notorious than any trapper who left civilized doin's and foofurraws behind him for the solitude of the mountains.

He was more the real mountain man than either Carson or Bridger and, in case you didn't know, Bill Williams Peak is named after him as well as the Williams Fork of the Grand River in Colorado. The town of Williams, Arizona, is another monument to this giant of early mountain trappers. While authorities differ on the definition of the mountain man, there is no disagreement as to whether or not Ol' Bill Williams rightfully belongs in this category. The plains, where Carson and Bridger earned most of their fame, were too tame for Ol' Bill. The Rockies were his stamping ground, his last and only accepted home.

Here is a man whose rip-snortin' legends outrank those of the lumbermen's Paul Bunyan, whose tall tales favorably compare with those of Shorty Harris, champion of the desert's jovial exaggerators, whose homicidal predilections exceeded those of Mike Fink, whose misadventures topped those of Pecos Bill, on the range, and whose deeds aren't outshadowed by any other giant of the lost legion of western heroes. While Bunyan and Pecos were only myths, Bill Williams was genuine and lived to a good old age.

OL' BILL was born in Missouri, about 1788, and began his rip-snortin' career as a Methodist sin-buster on the lop-eared mule circuit. He claimed that he was so well known as a skypilot that even the chickens around every Missouri settler's house knew him. The roosters would begin to crow, he bragged, and draw lots to see which one got the honor of being fried for Parson Williams.

Women, he often said, were his weakness and he decided that a man who yearned after the fleshpots had better trade his Bible for a rifle and go where the only calico to be found adorned an Indian squaw. So he girded his loins and headed his lop-eared mule for the Rockies.

His pulpit pounding, he discovered, enabled him to sell himself to the Ute Indians as a medicine man. So he "womaned" with a couple of squaws and dug himself in with the savages until he had learned all they knew and could use this knowledge far better than they.

Then he went from one tribe to another, learning their languages, woodcraft and secrets while he made mighty medicine.

When he tired of this, Ol' Bill joined a party of white trappers and began to explore the west. He is the man who discovered the transparent mountain—but that's another story and doesn't have the authenticity of far more important adventures.

Historians generally agree on their descriptions of this most famous of mountain men. He had smoky, gray eyes, a sharp and thin face and a long beak for a nose. His whiskers covered a leathery countenance that had more wrinkles than a dried apple. Since he had only snags for teeth, his chin stuck forward until it threatened to meet his nose over the thin, bloodless lips.

Ol' Bill had an iron frame with bones and sinews more pronounced than were his steel muscles. He could take more punishment in the mountains than a wildcat and he had the strength of a grizzly.

In fact, he claimed to have licked two full-grown grizzlies with his bare hands when they challenged his path up a canyon. He liked to tell about that battle in later years.

It was the old she-grizzly, sneaking up on him from the rear, that snatched his hair with one sweep of her paw, he would relate, in his high, thin voice that cracked and wavered between pitches, resembling first a laugh and then a whine.

" 'Twarn't no Injuns scalped me," he'd explain. "That ol' b'ar come 'round this child, sudden like, and lifted my fleece as slick as you'd skin a beaver. I was mightnear a gone varmint. The skin on my forehead dropped down over this child's eyes and I had to clean up them b'ars from then on blindfolded. If I hadn't slept that night with my head in a porcupine's nest, I'd be as bald as a Galena pill. But the Injuns taught this old hoss how to charm the little mountain varmints and the porcupine filled this old skull fulla needles that match the hair on my chest plumb perfect. 'Course I had to kinda soften up the quills with b'ar grease so I could keep my hat on."

Williams always rode in advance of any mounted party, his body bent forward, his alert eyes peering from beneath his greasy, black hat or coonskin cap. He could smell Indians or game farther than other trappers could see them and he knew every mile of the frontier. That he was king of the mountains has never been disputed by historians.

He rode an old crop-eared, raw-boned, Nez Perce pony, which he had named "Pizen." It was his constant companion and as eccentric in disposition and action as its owner. His pack animals were tied to Pizen's tail and every

frontiersman as well as every Indian could recognize the outfit as far as it could be seen. Ol' Bill's buckskin shirt and fringed pants, like those of other mountain men, had taken on grease and smoke until the material was unrecognizable. His leather pants merely covered his legs; his buttocks were bare. His moccasined feet were hidden in huge wooden stirrups as large as coal-scuttles and his spurs rattled like antique armor.

He carried his long, heavy rifle across his saddle horn and the wood stock was almost hidden beneath the brass tacks that tabulated his homicidal successes. Bullet pouch and powder horn, plus his war bag of "possibles" and his sheath knife made up his essential baggage.

The "possibles" or "fixin's" included a bullet-mould, a tiny horn of beaver castor for baiting traps, leather whangs and an awl for mending, flint, pipe and tobacco, and a bit of rock salt. Ol' Bill had a sweet tooth but with sugar so scarce he had to depend on an occasional bee tree to allay his cravings.

His pack animals carried his beaver traps, frying pan, coffee pot, canteen, pelts, picket ropes, blanket, and other possibles, common to the mountain man. Usually taciturn and truculent, he talked to his mules as if they were human, cursing them with unprintable pet names and pretended abuse. They always had his careful attention before he turned in at night or allowed himself any ease or comfort.

Ol' Bill could make a saddle, snowshoes, bull boat or canoe. He could mend a gun, dress game, build a cabin or a fort, dig a cache that would defy the eyes of any snooping Indian, cook a meal, drive a Conestoga, draw a map, break a horse, cut sign, read the moccasin telegraph or smoke signals, run his own bullets, talk Injun—by mouth or gesture—trap any animal and skin it, guide a train, scout for the army, imitate all bird calls, think like an Injun, shoot the buttons off your coat at five hundred yards and lick anything on two or four legs. In fact, he was a giant of his profession.

HE WAS a touchy individual and nobody could handle him until he met up with Kit Carson, in 1838. He despised blundering army men and, like all his kind, loathed the most simple civilized fixin's as effeminate foofurraw. When asked if he ever got lonesome in the wilderness he would answer, "If I do, this child jest starts a game of solitaire and before I know it, there's some jughead gapin' over my shoulder and tellin' me to play the red ten on the black jack."

As a trapper of beaver, Ol' Bill had no peer. "It ain't hooman nature not to trap," he said in 1837, when the invention of the high silk hat ruined the beaver trade. "The Almighty made the varmints and He made man to trap 'em."

By the following year, the value of pelts had fallen so low that the old timer found himself joining up with Carson's men to kill buffalo for Bent's fort on the Arkansas River. Distrusting men of all other vocations, Ol' Bill was never quite able to adjust himself to the new life. But he became famed as a buffalo hunter, without a Ned Buntline to publicize him.

It was the incredible tales he spun that endeared him to the mountain men. Many of them lacked the imagination possessed by the old timer and none had as many brass tacks driven into the stock of his rifle. Most of them were younger men—Williams was past fifty at this time—and they had not covered the vast territory explored by Ol' Bill.

Around the fire at night, the mountain man would regale his *compadres* with big windies that they couldn't hope to match. Who else could have discovered the glass crystal mountain, so transparent that you walked right into it, banging your nose, before you were aware of its existence.

Who but Ol' Bill had ever penetrated the "putrified" forest, where the putrified birds flew from one putrified tree to another. And when some skeptical youngster wanted to know why the law of gravity left the birds in mid-air, who but Ol' Bill would know that the law of gravity, too, was putrified.

Not even Jim Bridger could tell a bigger whopper than Williams. It was Ol' Bill who visited the giants on an island in the Great Salt Lake and ate boiled beaver tail two yards long and corn on the cob three feet in length. He could point to what other men guessed was smoke from a prairie fire and explain that it was smoke from the pipes of the giants.

It was Ol' Bill who caught the two painters by the tails, while he was hiding in a hollow log. This was at a time when his powder was running low and he was being stalked by this pair of mountain lions.

Wanting to conserve his powder, he crawled into a hollow log and waited for them. Through knot holes on each side of the log, he watched the painters circle his hiding place.

When the big cats came close enough, Ol' Bill reached through the knotholes and grabbed a tail in each hand. Quickly, he tied the two appendages together with a half-hitch inside the log and crawled out to watch the fun.

"Them two varmints fit like Kilkenny cats, with their tails tied over a wire fence," he often explained. "Finally, they jest plumb went to work devourin' each other until each had et up the other as far as the holes in the log. They couldn't reach what was left inside, so they plumb give up the ghost."

And if any listener showed skepticism, Ol' Bill would produce the two dried-up tails still tied in the same original knot. After such conclusive evidence, there was nothing more to be said.

As more pilgrims came to the fort and civil-

ized doin's increased in volume, Ol' Bill became more and more disgusted. He hankered after the isolation of the mountains, and the sissified habits and accoutrements of the Easterners sickened him. He craved to starpitch on a mountain top, rub out an occasional Blackfoot, and commune with the gods of the wilderness. So he high-tailed it away from Fort Bent.

He had a habit of turning up at the most unlikely places, at the most unexpected times, when he casually performed the most surprising and incredible deeds. The entire frontier knew him and, without success, was always trying to anticipate his next extraordinary feat.

If Ol' Bill was with a large party of trappers who would not heed his warning that "thar's sign about," he'd completely ignore them, while he rounded up his pony and mules to slip away and leave the party to its fate. He would fight like a demon when it was necessary to defend a cooperative party, but he would do it his own way. And his method was always best. If the trappers failed to follow his advice, he would so utterly disappear that neither whites or savages could find him. Chameleon-like, he would blend with the landscape, his animals and pelts invisible to the eye.

He was loyal to his friends and there is a legend of his fighting a running battle with the Utes to save a party of trappers who were beseiged by redskins in a canyon north of Fort Hall. There were no troops at the fort and Ol' Bill ran the gauntlet to Fort Laramie to get the soldiers. When Pizen gaven out, he hid the old pony in a gulch and finished the journey on foot. He reached the post, gut shrunk, his feet a bloody mess, and completely exhausted, but in time to save his friends.

Billy Dixon, of Adobe Walls fame, and Frank Harris, the notorious literary big windy, are two of the famed rifle shots who killed Indians at a thousand yards. But it was Bill Williams who outdid both of them. On the dangerous journey to Fort Laramie, Ol' Bill kept so far ahead of the Utes that he would be out of sight around a bend in famous Echo Canyon, before he could reload his gun. This made it difficult to draw a bead on his pursuers.

The old mountain man solved his problem by shooting his bullets against the curving canyon wall, a thousand yards behind him, causing the lead to ricochet into his foes. By this method, he cut down large numbers of his pursuers.

When asked how he could determine the success of these amazing shots, Ol' Bill would reply in his whiny, cracked voice, "I'd listen for the echo and if the bullet missed an Injun, this old coon would hear it slam up against a rock, a half mile to the rear. Then the dad-ratted canyon would produce no less 'n ten echos. But this child didn't miss none. If I had, I wouldn't never have made it to the fort."

Back in the Rockies, Ol' Bill was happy and contented. He didn't even care about moccasin mail, the letters left in a cow's horn or moccasin buried at the foot of a tree by some passing trapper. He lived penuriously in a land of plenty and came out only for the annual rendezvous to meet the Carson men and others. Then he would have a rip-snortin' time with plenty of tobacco, whiskey and Indian women. Sugar was two dollars a pint and Ol' Bill laid in all he could afford with his other supplies. In the cold gray dawn of the morning after the rendezvous ended, he would bid good-by to Kit Carson and his other friends and head Pizen back into the mountains.

One winter's day, about the time of the California Gold Rush, a party of trappers, returning from the wilderness, came upon a man's body in a ravine. Frozen stiff, it was propped up against a tree with a bullet hole between the eyes. Half covered with snow, the scene indicated that the man had given a creditable account of himself against the Utes before he had used his last bullet for himself.

It was Ol' Bill, and this time the Injuns got his scalp.

THE CAMP-FIRE

Where Readers, Writers and Adventurers Meet

JAMES ATLEE PHILLIPS, who gives us "The Kunming Story" on page 120 this month, didn't get properly introduced when he made his initial appearance on our contents page in the December issue with "The Acing of Field Marshal Cluff." As operational representative for CVAC in either India or China (we could never find out which) he was an elusive guy to corral at the *Camp-Fire*, to say the least. Now that he's back from the Orient we've managed to garner the following feverish dossier—

Born: Jan. 8, 1915.

Attended Texas University, T. C. U. and Univ. of Missouri, in that order.

Worked in oil fields as roustabout and pipe liner for years.

Married 1938 and went to N. Y. where worked at Aquacade and Diamond Horseshoe as publicity agent for Billy Rose.

Back to Texas in 1941, where became operational manager at Hicks Field, primary training school, etc. for 18 months.

Then to work for Consolidated Vultee, assistant supervisor of tool control for eight months, then CVAC's operational representative in China.

One son.

On return from China—Oct. 22, 1945—joined U. S. Marine Corps. At present on editorial staff of *The Leatherneck*, in Washington.

Writing idiosyncrasies many and varied. Usually work attired in nothing but shorts and hat. Writing is done spasmodically, due to lack of time for it, or by chance.

In addition to short stories, am author of a novel, "The Inheritors," published several years ago by the Dial Press, and a mystery novel, "The Case of the Shivering Chorus Girls," published by Coward McCann.

Wife wants to live in China; Phillips in Mexico. This will have to be straightened out when time comes.

T. F. TRACY, who hasn't been with us since the January '44 issue when "Zone of Occupation" appeared, makes a long leap in distance and time from the setting of that story—Nazi-occupied France of World War II—to the Redcoat infested North American wilderness where Marion's men campaigned, guerrilla-fashion, even as did the Maquisards of Europe more than a century and a half later.

Mr. Tracy writes—

"Hunters' Moon" is not just a story; it is a chunk of history. It is an attempt to represent in dramatic, blow-by-blow terms, a typical raid of one of Marion's detachments. Such a raid actually took place. The officers named here led it. The weapons used by the men in the story are the weapons used by Marion's command. The tactics, the strategems, the use of weapons (as the mounted shotgun charge) are typical examples of Marion's flexible and tricky technique as a guerrilla leader.

He was one of the good ones.

If "tactics is a matter of making use of what you have," as Fletcher Pratt says, then Marion was a master of tactics. His whole mode of warfare was based on his type of weapons, the kind of men who fought under

him, the terrain on which they fought. He knew that at close range, and particularly in night fighting, a heavily charged, double-barreled fowling piece — shotgun — was worth a dozen rifles, and that at long range his frontier riflemen could knock the buttons off Tarleton's Dragoons seven times out of ten.

These qualities of Marion and his command played a bigger role in the Revolution than most Americans are aware of. With a few handfuls of these frontiersmen, Marion, Pickens and Sumter not only kept the coastal Tories from overrunning South Carolina, but forced the British to divert to the South thousands of crack cavalrymen whose presence in the North would have added dangerously to the already heavy burdens of Washington's command.

Our histories of the Revolution mention a few of their battles: King's Mountain, Cowpens, Guilford Courthouse, Augusta; and gloss over as "harassing of the enemy" the hundreds of wicked night raids, the murderous bush fights: Monk's Corners, Lenud's Ferry, Kingstree, Burdell's Tavern, Jack's Creek—the seizures of supplies, the release of prisoners, the smashing of patrols. Yet each of these fights had its importance in the long war. They were important to the Revolution and important to the men who fought them. Each of them had its problems of command, its hitches, its unforeseen turns, its necessary shifts and improvisations. And each of them had, just as had Gettysburg, the Argonne, or the bitter Beaches, its own drama of men in action. That drama is the heart of every battle, and I hope I have been able to give the reader a little of it here in "Hunters' Moon."

THREE additions to the roster of our Writers' Brigade this issue. Here's Coleman Meyer, who's "Adam Was a Chump" appears on page 76. An old dirt-track racing driver himself, even as is the hero of his story, we can't subscribe to any such casual dismissal of those hectic years as he would have us accept in the following—

Now that the question is asked I find that my career isn't much to look backward at nor forward to; a few years at a trade, quite a few in radio and some in selling, comprise the ordinaries and the "musts" for satisfactory and regular eating.

Those that might be found a little out of the usual line took in three years of dirt-track racing that netted some fun, some scars, much travel and darn little money. Three years of promoting dirt-track racing had the same net gain except that the fun was replaced by a large headache that even two aspirins wouldn't help.

The last five or six preceding the war were spent in announcing chores for racing events and these added up the same way except that the money was more consistent and in larger chunks—mostly because, now being wise in the ways of promotion, I was usually first at the payoff window before the promoter ran quite out of currency.

Oh, yes—there was an airline mixed in the thing, also. That was back in the Depression (capital letter, please) and it might have been United Air today except that we broke a crankshaft before our first charter flight at a time when we couldn't have financed the oil in the crankcase, let alone a $350.00 piece of bent metal. Being a one-plane, two-man organization our withdrawal from the ranks of SAT operators did not shake the stock market.

Racing drivers, as a class, are anachronistic. Maybe that's why they put life and limb on the block for peanuts, sans salt. They beef about the payoff, they beef about the track and, except for notable exceptions, are usually uneasy about the actual racing itself. The fun is beforehand and afterward and perhaps the most satisfactory compensation is when you can get the phone number of the blonde who gives you that kiss and the trophy for the time trials. "Adam Was a Chump" is part of that collectively screwy life.

We want another racing yarn from Mr. Meyer very soon—and a bigger hunk of reminiscence about his background to go with it!

C. W. CHAMBERLAIN, who introduces us to that "Rip-Snortin' Mountain Man," Bill Williams, on page 125, was born in Randolph, Nebraska and moved to South Dakota ahead of the railroads. He attended school, surrounded by Indian reservations, and learned to talk Sioux like a redskin. Medical sergeant in World War I. Newspaper man—St. Paul *Dispatch*, Kansas City *Star*, Sioux City *Tribune*, Sioux Falls *Press*, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, *News*, Fargo *Courier News*, Chicago *Tribune*, and many others. Illinois State Supervisor of Health Education 1933-41. Now free-lances under a California date palm.

TALK about the long arm of coincidence! Kern L. Perc, who gives us "Charlie Lynxear and the Law" on page 43, really stretches it. Witness—

Anent Charlie. I first met the old cuss about forty years ago, while hunting with my brother in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. We were spending our winter vacation in our grandfather's lumber camp and in our eagerness to augment our always inadequate funds with timber-wolf bounties, we wandered too far afield, got caught in a ripsnortin' blizzard and wound up in old Charlie's shack. We had already heard a lot about him from Gramp and the lumberjacks. He sure was a crabby old coot, but he thawed us out, dried our clothes and stuffed our lean bellies with the most toothsome 'coon and corn-pone concoction I ever ate. Afterwards, he took us back to camp.

Gramp had told us he believed old Charlie had come up from the Kentucky moun-

tains shortly after the Civil War. That's where we thought he got his name. The "Charlie Lynxear" is, of course, fictitious. He was known far and wide, even in the corridors of the State Capitol where his ructions for the conservation of game long reverberated, simply as "Old Ken." So, while he was fussing around fixing our grub, the irrepressible curiosity of youth got the best of me and I blurted out, "Is your first name Kentucky?" He glared at me for a second and then said, "Nope; jest plain Ken."

His old-fashioned, key-wound watch, big as a rutabaga, was near my elbow on the rough pine table. Surreptitiously I thumbnailed the silver lid on the back. Engraved in beautiful script on the inner case was this: *Presented to Kenneth S.* (so help me!) *White for outstanding services in the conservation of game!* There was a date and a name (Game Club, I believe) that I have long since forgotten.

Yes, Old Ken was quite a character. Crotchety and generally taciturn, but he certainly had the courage of his convictions, and his principles concerning game laws were absolutely immutable. And if he considered the State laws too lax at times, he just made some of his own, and woe unto the trapper or hunter who was brash enough to violate them! I know that they feared and respected him more than they did any game warden.

Frankly, I am mighty pleased to have the story appear in *Adventure*—and glad that some subconscious prescience impelled me to rechristen the hero instead of using his real name!

By the way, Buck Beasley (the name is fictitious) wasn't really hanged. He was sentenced to life imprisonment but died on the way to the State Penitentiary. He slugged a deputy and broke his own neck plunging headlong from a Pere Marquette freight caboose in which he was being transported. Hanging seemed to be a more fitting finish, so I used that angle in the story.

As for me, I'm just an old soldier who has seen a heap of living in the past half-century; batted about on four continents; known a lot of worth-knowing folks; can get along in a dozen or so languages (excluding profane); am still pretty much alive despite several published accounts of my demise in various countries; etc, etc. ad infinitum ad nauseam, but what reader gives a damn about that? I know I don't. If the yarn's worth reading I don't care *who* wrote it!

We've encountered other Kenneth Whites from time to time but never one with our same middle initial. And while we've hunted in Michigan's Upper Peninsula our only contribution to the State's conservation program was to miss a deer (yes, buck fever!) with our borrowed 38-55 Marlin. Guess we can't claim any real kinship to "Charlie" after all. The old cuss would have been plumb ashamed of us!

SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL, who participated in formulating the broadcasts aimed at the Japanese from America for propaganda purposes during the war, adds the following remarkably interesting footnotes to his current Koropok story, "The Sword of Shinto." Mr. Small writes—

The simplest explanation of the Ronin, the masterless Japanese samurai who moved restlessly about, is that they were men who believed themselves charged with a mission to alter political conditions and to right what they thought were injustices, and who did both in a bloody fashion. There have been many bands of these Wave-Men; but the truly famous one was that of the Forty-seven Ronin, and their account is as familiar to Japanese as is the story of Santa Claus to us.

Briefly, the retainers of a noble, Asano, decided to avenge his death and disgrace. Asano, unversed in court etiquette, was taken to task by another noble, Kira, in the Mikado's palace, and Asano drew his sword and slashed the jeering Kira. For this brawling he was condemned to perform *seppuku*, his own palace was confiscated, his family was declared extinct, and his clan was disbanded. The members of the clan, the family retainers, decided that their lord's disgrace must be avenged. They laid elaborate plans, which ended with a storming of Kira's mansion, the killing of Kira's retainers, and the order to Kira to perform *seppuku* also, which Kira was too cowardly to do. So the Ronin did it for him, and, afterward, killed themselves. They now are accorded the admiration of the Japanese because of their great loyalty to their master. They are the heroes of Japan.

When the war with Japan began, with Tojo in power, I had the assistance of Japanese-American scholars in attempting to dig up the individual stories of each one of the Ronin. Less than a dozen could be found. What we wanted was to use the slogan of the Ronin—"It is impossible to live under the same heaven with the enemy of our lord"—and twist it so that Tojo was the enemy of Hirohito, and had betrayed him.

Anyone who listened to our short-wave propaganda beamed to Japan, and who understood Japanese, has heard the result.

What I did was to begin by telling the general story of the Forty-seven Ronin—only, mysteriously hinted at, I said that there were actually, in these modern days, forty-eight of them. For days the stories continued, and the curiosity of the Japanese listeners, we learned, was aroused, because there was nothing in the early broadcasts to indicate that this was American propaganda (which of course the Japanese stations were recording, and which they knew was beamed from the United States, although other auditors did not know this); and then we really got down to cases. After some thirty stories had been told—and I had to invent all but the actual ones—we let it be known that the mys-

terious Forty-eighth Ronin also had a mission of vengeance to perform. It was going to be up to him to order Tojo to perform *seppuku*, and if the coward refused, to kill him. (Incidentally we were correct in our estimation of Tojo, who is still alive.)

Now that the shooting has died away, perhaps it might be interesting to have a look-see at a bit of one of the radio scripts, before translation:

ANNOUNCER *The Forty-eight Ronin!*
MUSIC **SIGNATURE AS RECORDED**
VOICE 1 *I have a strange tale to tell you today—the story of the courage of Fuha Kasauuyemon, another of the Forty-seven Ronin who are our greatest heroes.*
VOICE 2 *Thank you. I have been thinking something. PAUSE. It is this, as one of our wise men has said: "Human affairs repeat themselves." PAUSE. So if a person accumulates wise thoughts, these can be applied some day to new cases. Is not that very true?*
VOICE 1 *Yes. It is very true. That is why the lesson learned from the Forty-seven Ronin—*
VOICE (FILTER) *IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO REMAIN UNDER THE SAME HEAVEN WITH THE ENEMY OF OUR LORD!*
VOICE 1 *—will be responsible for the loyalty and courage of another great hero, the Forty-eighth Ronin. But now, if you please, permit me to begin the story of Fuha Kasauuyemon.*
VOICE 2 *I regret the interruption. Please begin.*
VOICE 1 *Very well. CHANTING FOR STORY-TELLING. Fuha Kasauuyemon was a man thirty-four years of age. For several years he was* umamawari *in the household of Asano Takumi no Kami, before which he had been in the Sangakuji temple as a disciple. However, he had disliked priesthood, and instead of religious lessons he received military training from his superior, who was formerly a samurai with much experience in fighting. Fuha Kasauuyemon attached himself to the household of Asano Takumi no Kami. When his noble lord performed honorable* seppuku, *this retainer, like all of the others, swore—*
VOICE (FILTER) *IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO REMAIN UNDER THE SAME HEAVEN WITH THE ENEMY OF OUR LORD!*
VOICE 1 *—nor did any of the Forty-seven Ronin wait more eagerly for the sound which would mean vengeance.*
SOUND **WHISTLE**

And so the story about the retainer's part in preparation for the killing of his lord's vengeance began. I expect this could be called an invitation for someone to murder Tojo, although the latter went unnamed until we were certain we had built up an audience. When the last of the stories were being broadcast, we began to show, always indirectly and by reference to the Ronin, how Tojo had usurped Hirohito's power and was using it selfishly—and so any Japanese who was loyal to the Emperor would be performing a patriotic duty by killing Tojo. It was always done in a manner which would appeal to a fanatic. Here is a bit from the conclusion of one of the later broadcasts:

VOICE 2 *Why do we delay? Have I not sworn that—*
VOICE (FILTER) *IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO REMAIN UNDER THE SAME HEAVEN WITH THE ENEMY OF OUR LORD!*
VOICE 2 *Let us seek vengeance!*
VOICE 3 *Vengeance belongs to the Forty-eighth Ronin. It is he who will remove Tojo, who has insulted our lord. Oh, Tojo has not the courage to perform honorable* seppuku. *He is a coward, like the enemy of Asano Takumi no Kami. Therefore the Forty-eighth Ronin will kill him.*
VOICE 4 *And the Forty-eighth Ronin will become sacred after he has thus avenged the enemy of our lord—*
VOICES *Aaaaaaaa! The Tenno!*
MUSIC **SIGNATURE AS RECORDED**

Did it work? Some day I hope to have better reports. But Radio Tokyo screamed about the Japanese renegade who was responsible for the broadcasts, even so far as to identify him exactly.

They were wrong about that, too.

WE thought you'd get a kick—as we did—out of the the following interchange of letters between an *Adventure* reader and writer. Never any hard feelings when a guy who knows his stuff catches us up on a matter of detail—

Dear Editor:—

I enjoyed reading Mr. John Scott Douglas's story in the October issue very much. "Combined Operation" reminded me of many similar rescues we encountered during our Bering Sea patrols during my Coast Guard service.

One small item I feel obliged to call to Mr. Douglas's attention is when movies were being held on what he called the 326 foot cutter *Itasca*. It is to my knowledge that the *Itasca* was considerably under 300 feet long, around 225 feet in length I believe. The exact figure slips my mind.

There were only 7 cutters built for the Coast Guard of the 327 foot class. These were the *Ingham, Spencer, Duane, Bibb, Taney, Campbell,* and the *Hamilton* on which I had the honor to serve on both the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. I was for-

tunate enough to be transferred to a shore radio station just before the *Hamilton* made her last North Atlantic patrol and was torpedoed.

The personnel on the large cutters are very clannish and we always looked down on the lesser and older ships and that's why we resent having one of them classed as one of our so called "elite" class cutters. Notwithstanding that the *Itasca* was one of the USCG's most honorable and famous cutters and that her crew and the USCG are proud of her.

Ask Mr. Douglas to check up and see if I'm not right. Although I am out of the service now my pal Mr. George Ludy of Inverness, a former Chief Boatswain's mate on the old cutter *Bear*, and I keep the Coast Guard doings in mind always and we have much fun in stringing along the "boots" from the local USCG station about our experiences.

Cordially yours,
—Carlton M. Cherrigan
(formerly RM1c USCG)
Box 124 Iverness,
California.

We forwarded the above right back to California where Author Douglas makes his home, too, and here's his reply—

Dear Mr. Cherrigan:

It's good to hear from someone who has been in the Bering Sea region, for despite its bleak and barren aspects, it has a distinctive character and I'd like to see it again. And so probably would you, if you didn't get too much of it while on patrol.

Thanks for calling my attention to the exaggerated length I've attributed to the *Itasca*. I went aboard her several times in about October of 1940 while she was at Unalaska, met her commander and a number of officers and some of her crew and saw movies on her afterdeck as described in "Combined Operation." Three years later while in New York I was asked to do the captions for about 86 photographs appearing in a book on the Coast Guard brought out by McBride, checking of course with C. G. public relations officers. Several of the photos in the book ("He's in the Coast Guard Now") were of the 327-foot cutters, and apparently distance had lent enchantment in the three years that had elapsed for I was under the impression then and later when writing the story that this was the same class as the *Itasca*.

In trying to check on her length in the 1945 edition of "Jane's Fighting Ships," I found to my surprise that this fine cutter was not listed. I cannot understand the omission as even the "half-a-tender" *Alder* is named there. However, you seem quite familiar with the 327-foot cutters and it must be that I am in error. Perhaps some shipmate with whom you're in touch, or some *Adventure* reader, might know her exact size.

What you say about "Combined Operation" reminding you of similar rescues on Bering Sea patrols is extremely interesting, and perhaps if I tell you something of the genesis of the story, you'll see why this is so.

The reason, I believe, is because "Combined Operation" is more fact that fiction, and the operation was carried out by the

"Riley Grannan's Last Adventure"

This is the classic of funeral sermons—the sermon delivered in a burlesque theater in Rawhide, Nevada, by Herman W. Knickerbocker, the busted preacher-prospector, over the body of Riley Grannan, the dead-broke gambler.

Now that we are able to get the paper again ADVENTURE has ordered a large reprint of this famous booklet. The price is ten cents.

Adventure
265 East 22nd Streeet
Nek York 17, N. Y.

Please send me.....copies of "Riley Grannan's Last Adventure."
I am enclosing.....cents. (10c in stamps or coin for each copy desired.)

.....
Name

.....
Street Address

.....
City or Town State

lighthouse tender *Cedar* and the C. G. cutters *Unalga* and *Haida* (reduced to one cutter in the story for simplification). I heard of the sinking of the *Star of Falkland* at Akun Island while in Ketchikan, and the Alaskan C. G. commander there kindly allowed me access to the complete file on that rescue. Then, when making the Westward Cruise on the *Cedar*, I was able to fill in missing details by talking to Captain Leadbetter and the first mate, Mr. Vikanes, of that tender, and by making notes on every phase of the rescue. The story, based on the C. G. reports and the evidence of two participating officers on the *Cedar*, thus closely parallels an actual C. G. rescue in practically every detail and that's probably why it seemed so much like other Bering Sea rescues with which you were familiar.

Thanks a lot for writing and please remember that the latch-string is out if you ever come this way and feel the urge to swap yarns about the Northland.

With kindest regards, as always,

ALFRED POWERS continues herewith his interesting discussion of some of the research problems involved in writing "Chains for Columbus"—

The writer had a piece of good luck in getting books. He naturally called upon the public library and the historical library in Portland and the University of Oregon library at Eugene, but all the time he was on the lookout for what the old bookstores might have. One day while he was browsing among the dusty shelves, he came upon a whole Spanish library which somebody had recently turned in. This included reference material by which could be reconstructed in the imagination the cities of Cadiz, Seville, and Granada. However, to determine whether Francisco could escape from the Alhambra, the big illustrated work on that palace was consulted in the art department of the library. It is a very rare book; references to it had been found in other reading; the library art room was approached with misgivings that such an unusual and gorgeous volume was on hand; but it was and what Francisco could or couldn't do became almost as clear as if that historic hill had been visited in person.

The landing in Central America and the events in the harbor there were partly things that happened elsewhere, together with many things that could have happened but have not been chronicled in history. In Francisco's subsequent travels northward along the Mosquito Coast and thence to Montezuma's capital, liberties were taken in that he was made the pioneer of all white men in this region, the time being earlier than any white person is historically known to have been there. However, some Spaniards were marooned in the country several years in advance of Cortes. Earlier still, some time in the 1490's, Columbus made a secret voyage to the mainland. This fact is not widely known. A record was found in the back volumes of a geographical magazine.

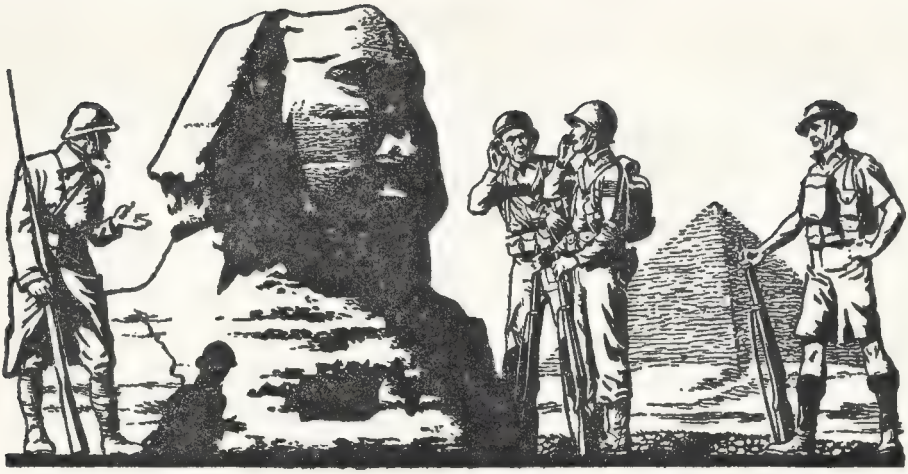
The boa constrictor scene in the latter part of the story was one of the plot features originally conceived for the narrative. While natural history books provided many of the details, some vivid background was furnished by Robert Southey's long legendary poem *Madoc*.

On the ancient cities of Yucatan, much material was, of course, available. The main difficulty was to put together characteristic features of the ruins so as to present two towns of distinctive personalities.

Perhaps the hardest plot problem of the whole story wherein research had to furnish logical motivation for Topozula's change of heart toward Francisco, was at Popocatepetl. Picturing the mountain and the crater as they were at that time was not difficult, since detailed descriptions were available, but after the Aztecs had him in the bottom of the place, why did they let him out? The solution was finally arrived at through the assistance of a friend who is a scientific writer. The matter of going to Popocatepetl for sulphur is true, for Cortes in his conquest of Mexico actually sent men up there to get that ingredient of his gunpowder.

The reconstruction of Mexico City is largely from Prescott and Bancroft.

AS we confessed last month we're often as much interested in the difficulties an author has to surmount during the birth pangs of a story as we are in the finished product and feel that you, too, may welcome the chance to have a behind-the-scenes look at a serial-in-creation even as the completed narrative unfolds.—K.S.W.



ASK ADVENTURE

Information You Can't Get Elsewhere

IT'S dangerous to use high-power loads in guns that weren't built for them!

Query:—I have a Winchester rifle, 1873 model, .38 cal. W.C.F. (38.40) in good condition. At the present time it is equipped with a Buckhorn receiver sight which is not accurate. I would like to have a peep sight installed instead. What type of peep sight is best for this kind of rifle, or what type of receiver sight would you suggest?

As to the type of ammunition, what is the best ammunition for this weapon? Can modern high-velocity loads be fired safely in it? Can you give me any history on this rifle?

—Frank J. Iarriccio
Yonkers, New York.

Reply by Donegan Wiggins:—I'm very glad indeed you wrote to me, before trying to use the Winchester High Velocity in your Model 1873 Winchester rifle.

IT WILL NOT STAND THE PRESSURES GIVEN BY THIS CARTRIDGE, WHICH MUST *NEVER* BE USED IN IT UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES: NEITHER MAY THE SO-CALLED "HIGH SPEED" LOADINGS BE FIRED IN 1873 MODEL ARMS OF ANY CALIBER. This rifle has the old link system, developed, before the Civil War, and is a weak sister as we judge arms today.

The proper cartridges are the ones loaded with black powder and lead bullets, for which the rifles were designed; or the low-powder smokeless with soft-point bullets, and stamped on the cartridge case head ".38 W.C.F." or ".38-40". These being loaded with a special powder, are safe as the old black in the model you own.

This rifle made the name of its makers famous all over the world, and can be found in every country on the globe, I understand. I own several myself; old but serviceable. I loaned one just an hour or so ago to a friend who came down from the mountains east of here, for the purpose of getting something to keep the deer out of his garden at home.

The manufacture of the 1873 Model has been discontinued for many years, but the old rifles, if well cared for, don't seem to wear out. Just use low-power cartridges, and I think they will kill a bear or buck as well as they ever did, even though they are a close-range rifle only, not like our modern high-power, long-range rifles.

I advise a Lyman or Marble tang sight, placed on the grip of the rifle.

A HOME in Morocco.

I am looking for a spot to settle down in after the war is over where the climate is suitable and the cost of living not too high, and have about decided that French Morocco might be the solution. I am acquainted with some parts of the country, having landed with American troops near Casablanca at the time of the invasion of Africa, and so am familiar with the country as far up as Tunisia. However, I am more interested in the territory around Mogador. What can you tell me about this locality as to climate, European population, living costs, and suitable accommodations?

—Raymond H. Giles,
Lieut. Col., U.S.A. (Retired)
Portland, Oregon

Reply by Capt. H. W. Eades:—Following are some notes on that part of Morocco

in which you are interested. To begin with, I would say that if you are familiar with the coastal country north of Casablanca, you know what it is like south of that famous spot, for conditions are pretty much the same down to the region of Spanish territory, where they change rapidly—for the worse. In the years before the war, there was quite an influx of French (mostly French), Spanish and English settlers into western Morocco, but most of it was in the region of Casablanca, where the French had vast harbor development schemes, or north of that point. If you like to live the life of a country squire, with plenty of cheap native labor, where land is not expensive but extremely fertile, and where a small sum of American money at an enhanced rate of exchange will go a long way, this is it. But there are drawbacks. North African towns, that is, those which have been more or less Europeanized, are pretty much of the same type, with a lot of shoddy gentility, swarms of mixed breeds of both sexes getting a living in the underworld, much night life, many smells, many flies, French methods of cooking, and with an abundance of diseases, some quite frightful in form amongst the native population. You do not read about these things in books, but they are very real. On the other hand, you make delightful friends in time whom you may value so much as to make these other handicaps small by comparison.

Mogador is in the region of the southern extremity of the fertile coastal plain which extends from the region of Cape Chir in a northeasterly direction to the Mediterranean. The trees, cereals and fruits are similar to those of southern Europe. The coastal plain is thickly populated with Berbers, Arabs, Moors and Jews in the towns, with many French, who on the whole occupy the top notches in society. The principal exports are maize, wool, oil, leather, and fez caps.

The greater part of western Morocco consists of plateaus, rising gradually from the coast to the foot of the Atlas, and extending far into the interior. The region may be divided into 1. the Gharb or northern district, 2. an intermediate zone, 3. the Huz, or southern district. The Huz region rises in tiers from the Atlantic coast (from Cape Chir to Rabat) toward the Atlas Mountains. Three zones may be distinguished, 1. a coastal plain, 2. an inland plateau, 3. a plain lying just at the foot of the Atlas. The coastal plain has at its widest a breadth of 50 miles and rises gradually inland to a height of 500 to 600 feet. This region is very fertile and contains the richest cornlands of Morocco. South of the Wad Tensift, it merges into steppe land. The inland plateau rises very sharply from the plain to a height of 1200 to 2000 feet, extending inland for about 50 to 60 miles. The steppe land of which it is composed supports great herds of cattle and flocks of sheep. The Atlas plain, of which the high plain of Marrakesh (Morocco) forms the central portion, is about 200 miles long by about 20 miles wide, extending as far as Bujad in the Tadla region. Marrakesh itself lies in a large oasis, and is an important center of communications. The plain merges on its southern border into the range of the Atlas proper.

South of Mogador the coast becomes more inaccessible from the sea. The best *natural* port on the Atlantic coast is that of Laraish (El-Araish) which falls within the Spanish Moroccan zone. Mogador and Agadir are somewhat more sheltered, but as a rule vessels can only approach to within 1½ to 2 miles of the coast.

The rivers of this region, the Wad Tensift, the Wad Sus, and the Wad Draa (which forms the southern boundary of Morocco) are intermittent in flow and in summer dry up. Some of the water is drawn off for irrigation.

On the Atlantic coast the annual mean temperature is fairly low and the daily and yearly variations are slight. The year falls into two seasons, the cool rainy season from November to April and the hot dry season from May to October. The east wind (sirocco) which blows from the desert in summer raises the temperature considerably, though the sirocco periods vary, e.g. at Mogador the wind blows only two or three times a year and never lasts more than half a day, while at Agadir it sometimes blows continually for several weeks. The west winds which prevail in winter tend to lower the temperature, though south of Rabat the thermometer never falls below freezing point. Inland the conditions are different, as both daily and yearly variations are great. At Marrakesh the heat in summer is much greater than on the coast, while in winter it is lower, especially at night, but even in January and February the thermometer rarely falls below freezing point.

The west winds in winter bring a considerable amount of moisture and the effects of this consequent rainfall are felt from 30 to 60 miles inland. The rain is most abundant in the northwest especially in the Gharb, gradually lessening as one goes south.

The efforts of the French to provide a great port for the Atlantic coast of Morocco were concentrated on Casablanca (Dar-el-Beida). At no place on the coasts of Morocco are there any good natural harbors and no Moroccan port is really well sheltered. In southern Morocco there are four ports more or less capable of development: Mazagan, Saffi, Mogador and Agadir. They are all exposed to westerly winds. Mazagan presents perhaps the greatest possibilities, as it lies in a small bay, where good shelter could be secured by a breakwater. Mogador (Suerah) is at present the best of the southern ports and lies in a channel between the land and Mogador Island. Agadir has a calmer sea and is more sheltered than the others from the prevailing north winds. Violent tidal races are frequently produced on this coast.

Casablanca was the outlet for much of the commerce of Marrakesh. That city, which is the capital of the south and the goal of the caravans from beyond the Atlas Mountains has a trade at least as important as that of Fez. It is believed that although Saffi is the nearest port, most of the imports to Marrakesh come through Mazagan and the exports are divided between Mazagan and Mogador. All these southern ports have rich fertile districts behind them. Mazagan is on the edge of the Dukkala province, a region of fertile "black soil." Mogador is the natural port of the Huz district and has also much of the trade of the plain of the Sus; in free competition for the latter, however, Agadir should always have the advantage.

In general, the climatic conditions are favorable to all and in most places are adapted for European or American visitors and settlers as well as for the natives. Among the natives a variety of diseases are common.

There are many Jews in Morocco. Their position has been an unhappy one, but it appears to be improving. They are still subject to vexatious restrictions, but are now more despised than ill-treated. The trade of Morocco is largely in their hands (or was before the war—this may have changed) particularly in the cities and ports, and Mogador has a very large Jewish population. This town is modern, with most of the amenities of civilization. There has been considerable influx of Europeans into it, as into the other coastal towns such as Tangier, Rabat and Casablanca (also a health resort).

The road system in this western region is good. Trunk roads connect the coast towns from Mahediya to Mogador with one another, and with the inland cities. The roads are fit for automobile and heavy traffic at all seasons. There is a government radio station at Mogador. Railways in this region are primitive by our standards.

Only a small part of the available land has been brought under cultivation. Annual crops are chiefly cereals such as wheat, barley, maize, sorghum, and broad beans, chick peas, and lentils. Cotton has been tried and may succeed. Sugar-cane was once grown in the plain of the Sus, but the climate is not suitable to it. Fruit-tree cultivation is carried on largely with the help of irrigation. Almost all the towns of Morocco are surrounded by magnificent orchards and gardens. Almonds are exported in quantity.

The right of acquiring land in Morocco was only gradually conceded to foreigners, and even now, except in the towns and their environs, purchase is attended with so many difficulties that it is frequently replaced by a registered contract of partnership between the foreigner and a native partner.

Many shops and retail businesses have of late years been established by Europeans in the towns and cities, catering largely to the new population that has swarmed into the country, and dealing largerly in European imported goods.

I hope these rambling notes will be of value to you. If you wish to secure any further items of specific information, please get in touch with me again. If you finally do go to this region, I would be delighted to hear from you. May be interested in living there myself some day.

NEW faces for old coins.

Query: I have many old coins that need to be cleaned and I do not know how to do it without risking damage to them. Some Roman coins have verdigris. How do you take that green off? Some of my friends use White Vinegar. Is it good?

—F. Gilinas
991 Notre Dame W.
Montreal, Quebec.

Reply by William L. Clark:—There are three electrolytic systems for cleaning coins. The first and simplest method, good for tarnished silver, is to place a sheet of aluminum in a boiling solution of one heaping tablespoonful of washing soda to one quart of water, then put the coin in contact with the aluminum plate. Keep the coin in the solution until the tarnish is all loosened and then clean with a silver cleaning cream, containing no jeweler's rouge.

The second method, for more stubborn coins, particularly those with a great deal of corrosion, is to place them between two zinc plates in a 10% solution of sodium hydroxide (lye) for several hours, until the corrosion is loose, then clean as before.

The last of these methods is to use a storage battery trickle charger and a 2% solution of sodium hydroxide in a glass container. The plus terminal of the charger is connected to a platinum electrode, which in the solution becomes the anode. The minus terminal is connected to the coin and becomes the cathode. In this process free hydrogen comes off the coin and oxygen off the anode. With this system the heaviest corrosion can be reduced and good results obtained. Coins with a light tarnish can be cleaned in about five minutes and some ancient coins with a very heavy, hard corrosion have been kept in this bath for as long as nine months.

In all of these methods, the cleaning is the same after the bath. A tooth brush can be used with the silver cleaning cream, and after rinsing well in hot water, the coin wiped with a soft rag. All silver and new copper can be lacquered after cleaning with a good grade of cellulose lacquer diluted one half with thinner. If the lacquer is too thin rainbows will be seen on very smooth surfaces and if too thick, the lacquer itself will be seen. Coins must be absolutely clean before lacquering. Old bronze or copper can be rubbed with beeswax or olive oil after cleaning.

Some coins can be cleaned entirely by washing with soap and hot water.

These processes generally work well, but on some pieces, when the corrosion has gone too far, a coin will break down in part or entirely. The subject is still open for experimentation and improvement.

HOLD your Panama hats, boys. Here we dive again!

Query:—I have often seen advertisements of Panama hats that have been "woven under water." Apparently, from the ads, headgear manufactured in this fashion is of particularly fine quality. Can you tell me how the native craftsmen manage to work under the surface of the water? What makes hats concocted in this manner more desirable than other types?

—J. K. Chambliss,
Westport, Conn.

Reply by Edgar Young:—Having made personal and autoptic investigation in the section of Ecuador where the Jipi-japa or so-called "Panama" hat is woven, it is my conclusion that no such headgear has ever been fashioned "under water."

This particular handicraft has been in existence for centuries and the hats were not only woven for the use of the coastal Indians themselves but were used as a valuable trade article for commerce with the highland Indians of the Andes, and I have personally seen thousands of them being worn by Quechuans and Aymaras in bitter weather in the high plateaus. How they came to be called "Panama" hats is due to the fact that they came there as trade articles and were carried to other parts of the world by ships calling at Colon on the Atlantic and Panama City on the Pacific side of the Isthmus.

It may be possible that the misinformation about the underwater weaving originated from the fact that the fiber is obtained from the leaves of a certain palmetto or small palm and these leaves are retted in vats until the pulp can be stripped away and the fiber washed and prepared. It is the finest and longest fiber that is used for making the best hats and some of these bring fancy prices right where they are made. I remember seeing one sold for $500 when I was at Monte Cristo years ago.

A little thought should convince anyone that hats of this sort could *not* be woven under water. There are hundreds of strands and if these were water-soaked it would be an utter impossibility to do the weaving by touch. Of course someone might weave a single hat under water on a bet, but as routine practice I will go on record as stating that it just isn't done. Much of the weaving is done in the early morning while the dew is on the ground and there is never much dew along this desert coast. Men, women, and children work at it and I know of no other Indians who have developed a more lucrative business on their own.

It is more or less by accident that I happen to know how the hats were woven. As a matter of fact I got off a coaster and went up among the Indian villages of this section of Ecuador with the sure expectation of seeing the hats woven under water, and I had speculated quite a bit as to how it could be done. I was distinctly disappointed to find they were not so woven at all. This has been years ago and I had heard the myth many times and I had heard it repeated in Guayaquil before leaving on the coast boat. I asked specifically and the Indians told me they would not know how to weave a hat under water, but they also knew about the myth and they laughed when talking about it.

At that time the work was just a part-time occupation and the Indians sat on the shady side of their thatched huts and held the hats on their laps and in their hands while they worked on them. They had a bundle of fibers lying beside them of the approximate size they needed for the particular type of hat they were working on at the time. They worked at them for a few hours in the morning and then again in the late evening and I noticed that they tucked them up under the thatch of the huts along the poles at the eves. The thatch was about a foot thick and I imagine that the proper humidity was to be found there to keep the fiber in condition between working times. A great many hats were being made but there was no centralized industry and each family sold hats to buyers when they came along. Almost everybody in a number of villages worked at the craft, and I noticed that each family had several extremely fine hats laid up which they hoped to receive high prices for and some of them were of such fine fibre and delicate weave that they might be classed as works of art.

On occasion, it has been stated, certain weavers, in order to keep the straw pliable, continually dip the fiber into a bowl of water. In other cases hats are woven in caves, where because of the high humidity the fiber at all times is kept very workable.

Here in the States the tobacco people are able to produce any degree of humidity they desire in redrying warehouses and factories and while we can never hope to compete with the Ecuador Indians in making hats by hand it might be possible to help them by causing them to adopt buildings with air so conditioned that they could put in a full day at the work.

THE Oregon Trail—to Africa.

Query:—(A) What language or languages are spoken in the city of Nairobi and in the district surrounding the city?

(B) What is the approximate size of the city of Nairobi?

(C) What is the surrounding countryside like?

—Donald Gomer,
Redmond, Oregon.

Reply by Gordon MacCreagh:—(A) Languages spoken in Nairobi are approximately 20% English, 60% Hindustani or Gugerati (East Indian), 10% Swahili (native). Of these, English is, of course, the most important, since all administration and business are carried on in English.

(B) I presume you mean the population. Pre-war population was approximately 20,000, of whom some 4,500 were British, 8,000 East Indians, and the balance were various African tribes with a preponderance of Kikuyu. Of importance to white-man living were the East Indians, since they owned many of the stores. The African natives were household servants.

After the war these proportions are likely to change, in that many Britishers will leave their homeland for settlement in such attractive colonial communities as Nairobi.

(C) Surrounding country is scenically beautiful, with magnificent views of snow-covered Kilimanjaro and Kenya. The town is connected by rail with Mombasa on the coast (some 325 miles) and with branch lines into the interior. The climate is one of the healthiest in Africa. (5,400 ft. above sea level). Days not too hot, nights cool. Every kind of garden truck and orchard fruit grows, but needs labor. Standard of living for white men is high, but correspondingly high are the costs of living. Not quite so high as in America for the reason that native help is cheap. Social life is on the "clubby" pattern. You belong to tennis clubs, golf clubs, bridge clubs, service clubs, what not; and, by God, you conform to the British conceptions of conduct and convention, or you don't belong. I make a point of this, meaning that class distinctions exist. You can't pal around with the local haberdasher and yet belong to the country club. There are all sorts of people whom you must "know." There are restaurants that you mustn't go to—just as our boys overseas have found to their surprise that certain places are restricted to "officers" and others to "other ranks." In civilian Nairobi, too, you will belong on one side or the other.

Now a warning. Your questions indicate that you are considering the possibility of emigrating to Nairobi—and if I lived in Oregon, so would I—speaking here out of a Florida climate. And if you are fortunate enough to have some money and can consider retirement, I'd be all for it. Though personally I'd choose Durban in South Africa.

BUT, if you must consider getting a job in Nairobi, I must tell you to consider very carefully.

The reasons are two. One is that the British policy, very naturally, is to give the job first to a Britisher. A foreigner will get in only if he has some special skill that the local Britisher has not.

The other reason is that a man can't go with just two good hands and a willingness to work and expect to live like a white man. For the reason that the local black man, brown man, half-breed man, will work for ten hours a day and get paid "nigger wages." And those boys can be trained just as well as a white man to all manual labor—machine shops, railway men, garage mechanics; and there's no high-priced union labor on a forty-hour week.

A white man may *own* a garage or a machine shop and may have, perhaps, a couple of boss mechanics; but the *work* is done by trained native help.

If you have some capital you may buy and run a sheep ranch or an orchard or a plantation. Meaning you ought to have closer to ten than to five thousand dollars to buy in on anything good and not too far out in the wilderness. Cheap land is where nobody wants it.

Nairobi can be delightful living; but it has its conditions.

MUSH!—*à la* Labrador and Alaska.

Query:—I've been told that the Eskimos of Labrador make and use dog team whips braided of raw sealskin—some of extreme length. Can you give me any details of the whips and how they are made, used, etc.

* * * *

What information can you give me about Alaskan dog team whips—length, kind of leather used, how carried and manipulated?

—Frank Dean,
1294 E. San Fernando St.,
San Jose, California.

Reply (1) by Wilmot T. De Bell:—The standard dog whip, as used on The Labbrador, consists of a short wood handle about twelve to fifteen inches in length about as big around as the handle of a baseball bat. It usually has a slight knob on the end to keep the hand from slipping off. As I recollect, the whip proper is made up of a number of strips of walrus hide plaited together to form a circular cross section. These strips which are a good quarter of an inch wide and half as thick, near the handle, taper continuously toward the tip. They comprise about half the length of the whip. The rest consists of a long lash of walrus hide or heavy seal skin about a little less than half an inch wide and tapering a little toward the tip.

In snapping the whip, you let it trail out straight behind you on the ground but a foot or so to the right (if you are right handed). The body is slightly turned toward the whip, the arm and shoulder are held back. The upper arm makes an angle of about 60 degrees below the horizontal with the elbow well clear of the body. The forearm slopes downward from the elbow about 20 degrees below the horizontal and toward the outside. The palm of the hand and the forearm are turned face upward. The handle is grasped firmly with whip end pointing backward, somewhat upward, and a little to the outside. The hand is about waist high. To snap the whip take a step

forward (or better, two or three running steps forward) and with the left foot well forward, bend your body evenly and smoothly forward to about a 45 degree angle. At the same time bring your shoulder and arm around, the hand describing, a slight convex arc, (a sort of low- "round house" motion). The arm is still well out from the body. The wrist is turned over smartly, much of the power comes from the wrist motion. At the correct instant pull back slightly with the arm and twist the wrist back smartly (the handle well to the outside). Naturally it takes practice to get the timing and accuracy.

The whip should curl forward low and well to the outside. The whip is almost laid out straight before the snap is given. Don't be surprised if you wrap it around your neck a few times (and it doesn't feel too good). I have seen them pull an underhand snap back also.

The whips are fifteen to eighteen feet long and can cut a dog to ribbons. Naturally, they don't want to disable a dog, so the whip is generally snapped close to the offending dog. The warning is enough, in most cases. In addition to dog driving, the whip is used to hold off the dogs of other teams while feeding your own. In breaking up dog fights they generally use the butt end.

I think any good dog driver could hit a tin can in range of his whip four times out of five. You hear remarkable tales of accuracy, but the Eskimos I have seen were no better than I have indicated.

As to the length of the whip, I have seen none of extreme length on The Labrador. The dogs on The Labrador are not hitched up tandem as in Alaska. Each dog has his individual trace fastened to a central loop close to the komatik (or sled). The traces are all of different lengths so that each dog can pick his own path. But when running straight, they will be nearly in line. A great deal of the going is over the ice (sometimes with open leads) or very rough going. If the team were hooked one behind the other, and they came to an open lead, each dog would have to get wet but if each dog has his own trace the driver can bunch his team and jump them across, all dry; or in crossing uneven ground, each dog can pull his weight all the time—for example going over a gully. But, get a green team with individual traces amongst the trees, and just listen to the language when they decide to go on different sides of the various trees!

* * * *

Reply (2) by Theodore S. Solomons:—One occasionally runs across pictures of dog-teams in the Arctic driven by fur-clad figures flourishing a long whip, *à la* mule skinner, and the like. And I have actually seen them used in my ten or more years in the Far North. But it was mostly amateur stuff. A long whip is impractical to the professional dog-freighter, or the miner or ordinary "musher" (light team traveler) for several reasons. In the first place he almost invariably travels at the rear of the sled and a whip to reach his leader would have to be about twenty feet long.

But the main reason is that dogs are just not built that way—they do not require it, and if and when a licking or a threat of it is required it is almost always for one dog or one or two and if you were to throw the stinger out to that one (especially if he were near the lead) it would scare and demoralize the others even if the driver were expert enough never to actually hit the ones he did not mean it for. Even the blacksnake, which IS the approved type of dog whip, is seldom used now, as compared with the early practice (Klondike days and a few years after) because it was slowly but surely forced on the minds of dog men that a dog was an animal to be encouraged and cajoled if he were lazy or tired, or even ornery, and not beaten. Fist fights, knockouts, laceration, mayhem and near murder have been committed on the trail by onlookers who just couldn't or wouldn't stand by or drive by and see dogs abused by brutes—foolish brutes, as I have intimated; for the net results have always been less speed and less poundage hauled over the trails by the dog beaters.

The black snake used generally, when a whip at all is carried, is the smooth leather black-snake from three to four feet or so long, with a handle about an inch and an eighth thick with a solid inside say four or five inches, and the leader (one piece) tapering down to a two inch buckskin lash at the end, which is about three eighths thick. It (the leather covering) is cut on an even, or uniform taper, filled with a strip or strips, and the leather then folded over and sewn with just the one long seam. I go into details perhaps unnecessarily, as the implement is, as I say, the more or less standard black-snake whip. When I used a whip at all it was a foot or so long, light, and used for purposes of intimidation mainly. Only the foxy dog needed it; the fellow who was inclined to shirk unless he knew that punishment was waiting for him if he did. Such dogs are exasperating, all right. They have (amongst them) fifty-seven varieties of shirk, characterized by as many kinds of bluffs and tricks of concealment from just plain not-pulling but looking innocent, to strenuous looks and fake positions in the collar and postures intended to make you think that they are tugging their hearts out when in reality they are letting George do it—forward or back or both. The short whip is used to give a kind of warning snap (and the driver for this purpose sometimes attaches a longer snapper to the snake) and for occasionally stopping the team and going forward, or running forward while the team is going, and threatening, or giving, a cut or so to the offending member of the team. The good dogs get to know that they are NOT in danger and will not swerve or flinch. And the one you're after usually digs into the collar before you get to him and looks innocent by the time you're by his side!

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Send each question *direct* to the expert in charge of the section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **Do Not** send questions to the magazine. Be definite; explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question. The magazine does not assume any responsibility. **No Reply** will be made to requests for partners, financial backing or employment.

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Notice: Many of our *Ask Adventure* experts are still engaged in government service of one kind or another. Some are on active duty in the Army or Navy, others serving in an executive or advisory capacity on various of the boards and offices which were set up to hasten the nation's war effort. Almost without exception these men consented to remain on our staff, carry on their work for the magazine if humanly possible, but with the understanding that for the duration such work was to be of secondary importance to their official duties. This was as it should be, and when you didn't receive answers to queries as promptly as we all wished, your patience was appreciated. Foreign mails are still slow and uncertain, many are still curtailed drastically, but now that the war is over we can hope for a more expanded, smoother functioning *Ask Adventure* service very soon. Bear with us and we'll continue to try to serve you as speedily as possible.

ASK ADVENTURE EXPERTS

SPORTS AND HOBBIES

Archery—EARL B. POWELL, care of *Adventure.*

Baseball—FREDERICK LIEB, care of *Adventure.*

Basketball—STANLEY CARHART, 99 Broad St., Matawan, N. J.

Big Game Hunting in North America: *Guides and equipment*—A. H. CARHART, c/o *Adventure.*

Boxing—COL. JOHN V. GROMBACH, care of *Adventure.*

Camping—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Canoeing: *Paddling, sailing, cruising, regattas*—EDGAR S. PERKINS, 1325 So. Main St., Princeton, Ill.

Coins and Medals—WILLIAM L. CLARK, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th, N. Y. C.

Dogs—FREEMAN LLOYD, care of *Adventure.*

Fencing—COL. JEAN V. GROMBACH, care of *Adventure.*

First Aid—DR. CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, care of *Adventure.*

Fishing: *Fresh water; fly and bait casting; bait casting outfits; fishing trips*—JOHN ALDEN KNIGHT, 929 W. 4th St., Williamsport, Penna.

Fishing, Salt water: *Bottom fishing, surf casting; trolling; equipment and locations*—C. BLACKBURN MILLER, care of *Adventure.*

Fly and Bait Casting Tournament—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Maine.

Health-Building Activities. Hiking — DR. CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, care of *Adventure.*

Motor Boating—GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, N. J.

Motorcycling: *Regulations, mechanics, racing*—CHARLES M. DODGE, care of *Adventure.*

Mountain Climbing—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 6520 Romaine St., Hollywood, Calif.

Old Songs—ROBERT WHITE, 913 W. 7th St., Los Angeles, Calif.

Rifles, Pistols, Revolvers: *Foreign and American*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, 170 Liberty Rd., Salem, Oregon.

Shotguns, American and Foreign: Wing Shooting and Field Trials—ROY S. TINNEY, Chatham, New Jersey.

Small Boating: *Skiffs, outboard, small launch, river and lake cruising*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

Swimming—LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 115 West 11th St., N. Y., N. Y.

Swords, Spears, Pole Arms and Armor—MAJOR R. E. GARDNER, care of *Adventure.*

Track—JACKSON SCHOLZ, R. D. No. 1, Doylestown, Pa.

Woodcraft—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Wrestling—MURL E. THRUSH, New York Athletic Club, 59th St. and 7th Ave., N. Y., N. Y.

Yachting—A. R. KNAUER, 6720 Jeffery Ave., Chicago, Ill.

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

Anthropology: *American, north of the Panama Canal, customs, dress, architecture; pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

Entomology: *Insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects*—DR. S. W. FROST, 465 E. Foster Ave., State College, Penna.

Forestry, North American: *The U. S. Forestry Service, our national forests, conservation and use*—A. H. CARHART, c/o *Adventure.*

Forestry, Tropical: *Tropical forests and products*—WM. R. BARBOUR, care of U. S. Forest Service, Glenn Bldg., Atlanta, Ga.

Herpetology: *Reptiles and amphibians*—CLIFFORD H. POPE, care of *Adventure.*

Mining, Prospecting, and Precious Stones: *Anywhere in North America. Outfitting; any mineral, metallic or non-metallic*—VICTOR SHAW, care of *Adventure*.

Ornithology: *Birds; their habits and distribution*—DAVIS QUINN, 5 Minerva Pl., Bronx, N. Y.

Photography: *Outfitting, work in out-of-the way places; general information*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, N. J.

Radio: *Telegraphy, telephony, history, receiver construction, portable sets*—DONALD MCNICOL, care of *Adventure*.

Railroads: *In the United States, Mexico and Canada*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill.

Sawmilling—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care of *Adventure*.

Sunken Treasure: Treasure ships; deep-sea diving; *salvage operations and equipment*—LIEUTENANT HARRY E. RIESENBERG, care of *Adventure*.

Taxidermy—EDWARD B. LANG, 156 Joralemon St., Belleville, N. J.

Wildcrafting and Trapping—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

MILITARY, NAVAL AND POLICE

Federal Investigation Activities: *Secret Service, etc.*—FRANCIS H. BENT, care of *Adventure*.

The Merchant Marine—GORDON MACALLISTER, care of *Adventure*.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police—ALEC CAVADAS, King Edward High School, Vancouver, B. C.

State Police—FRANCIS H. BENT, care of *Adventure*.

GEOGRAPHICAL SUBJECTS

Philippine Islands—BUCK CONNER, Conner Field, Quartzsite, Ariz.

★New Guinea—L. P. B. AEMIT, care of *Adventure*.

★New Zealand, Cook Island, Samoa—TOM L. MILLS, 27 Bowen St., Feilding, New Zealand.

★Australia and Tasmania—ALAN FOLEY, 243 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia.

★South Sea Islands—WILLIAM MCCREADIE, No. 1 Flat "Scarborough," 83 Sidney Rd., Manley N. S. W., Australia.

Madagascar—RALPH LINTON, Dept. of Anthropology, Columbia University, N. Y., N. Y.

Africa, Part 1 ★*Libya, Morocco, Egypt, Tunis, Algeria, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*—CAPT. H. W. EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C. **2** Abyssinia, Italian Somaliland, British Somali Coast Protectorate, Eritrea, Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya—GORDON MACCREAGH, 2231 W. Harbor Drive, St. Petersburg, Florida. **3** *Tripoli, Sahara caravans* — CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care of *Adventure*. **4** *Bechuanaland, Southwest Africa, Angola, Belgian Congo, Egyptian Sudan and French West Africa*—MAJOR S. L. GLENISTER, care of *Adventure*. **5** ★*Cape Province, Orange Free State, Natal, Zululand, Tranevaal, Rhodesia*—PETER FRANKLIN, Box 1491, Durban, Natal, So. Africa.

Asia, Part 1 ★*Siam, Malay States, Straits, Settlements, Java, Sumatra, Dutch East Indies, Ceylon*—V. B. WINDEL, care of *Adventure*. **4** *Persia, Arabia*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care of *Adventure*. **5** ★*Palestine*—CAPTAIN H. W. EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C.

Europe, Part 1—*Denmark, Germany, Scandinavia*—G. I. COLBRON, care of *Adventure*.

Central America—ROBERT SPIERS: BENJAMIN, care of *Adventure*.

South America, Part 1 *Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Chile*—EDGAR YOUNG, care of *Adventure*.

★West Indies—JOHN B. LEFFINGWELL, Box 1333, Nueva Gerona, Isle of Pines, Cuba.

Iceland—G. I. COLBRON, care of *Adventure*.

Baffinland and Greenland—VICTOR SHAW, care of *Adventure*.

Labrador—WILMOT T. DEBELL, care of *Adventure*.

Mexico, Part 1 *Northern Border States*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex. **2** *Quintana Roo, Yucatan Campeche*—CAPTAIN W. RUSSELL SHEETS, care of *Adventure*.

Canada, Part 1 ★*Southeastern Quebec*—WILLIAM MACMILLAN, 89 Laurentide Ave., Quebec, Canada. **3** *Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario*—HARRY M. MOORE, 579 Isabella, Pembroke Ont., Canada. **4** ★*Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario, National Parks Camping* — A. D. L. ROBINSON, 103 Wembly Rd. (Forest Hill), Toronto, Onto., Canada. **5** ★*Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta*—C. PLOWDEN, Plowden Bay, Howe Sound, B. C. **6** ★*Northern Saskatchewan; Indian life and language, hunting, trapping*—H. S. M. KEMP, 501—10th St., E., Prince Albert, Sask.

Alaska—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 6520 Romaine St., Hollywood, Calif.

Western U. S., Part 1 *Pacific Coast States*—FRANK WINCH, care of *Adventure*. **3** *New Mexico; Indians, etc.*—H. F. ROBINSON, 459 Towner Ave., Albuquerque, N. M. **4** *Nevada, Montana and Northern Rockies*—FRED W. EGELSTON, Elks' Home, Elko, Nev. **5** *Idaho and environs*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill. **6** *Arizona, Utah*—C. C. ANDERSON, Holbrook Tribune-News, Holbrook, Arizona. **7** *Texas, Oklahoma*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

Middle Western U. S., Part 2 *Ohio River and Tributaries and Mississippi River*—GEO. A. ZERR, 31 Cannon St., Pittsburgh, 5, Penna. **3** *Lower Mississippi from St. Louis down, Louisiana swamps, St. Francis. Arkansas Bottom*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

Eastern U. S., Part 1 *Maine*—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Me. **2** *Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I., Mass.*—HOWARD R. VOIGHT, 40 Chapel St., Woodmont, Conn. **3** *Adirondacks, New York*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif. **5** *Ala., Tenn., Miss., N. C.; S. C., Fla., Ga.*—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care of *Adventure*. **6** *The Great Smokies and Appalachian Mountains south of Virginia*—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE: We offer this department to readers who wish to get in touch again with friends or acquaintances separated by years or chance. Give your own name and full address. Please notify *Adventure* immediately should you establish contact with the person you are seeking. Space permitting, each inquiry addressed to *Lost Trails* will be run in three consecutive issues. Requests by and concerning women are declined, as not considered effective in a magazine published for men. *Adventure* also will decline any notice that may not seem a sincere effort to recover an old friendship, or that may not seem suitable to the editors for any other reason. No charge is made for publication of notices.

Anyone knowing the whereabouts of Sidney A. Levinson, of Yonkers, New York, thought to have been discharged from the Army, please contact his buddy who served with him in Melbourne, Australia, in early 1942. Pvt. George Raybin, 12035917, 26 Military Government, Hq. and Hq. Company, APO 235, San Francisco, California.

Pfc. Robert Wallish, 39735959, 3292nd Sig. Base Maint. Co., APO 75, c/o Postmaster, San Francisco, California, would like to get in touch with Robert Limbach, now sailing with the Merchant Marine, whose home is somewhere in Chicago.

George Bates, last known to have been at an RFD address in Camden, Minnesota. He is a jack of all trades, but worked mostly in steel work. Any information will be appreciated by Robert L. Page, 3308 Alamaba Avenue, St. Louis Park, Minneapolis 16, Minn.

B. E. Tribble, R. Route 2, Rising Star, Texas, wants to hear from anyone who knows what happened to Sgt. James F. McDonald, 38094492, 3rd Auxiliary Surgical Group, APO 230, last heard from in February, 1943. He is especially interested in hearing from anyone who served with Sgt. McDonald in Africa.

I would like to hear from anyone knowing the address of W. F. (Billie) Benz, who used to ride rodeo in California some years ago. He was last heard of in Willits, California. C. R. Douglas, 628 Del Mar, Pasadena 5, California.

I would like to get in touch with anyone knowing the whereabouts of Joe Zimmer or any of his family. He formerly lived in Marion, Indiana, where he worked in a glass factory. M. Shulaw, 506 Dubois, Lawrenceville, Illinois.

Would like to hear from or about Leonard Owens last heard from in Indianapolis in 1944; George J. Snyder of Clarksburg, W. Va., last heard from at U.S.N. Receiving Station, Norfolk, Va., 1943; Lt. Robert Hairston 3rd, was in 15th Air Force, home in N. Carolina; Cpl. Pennington (nicknamed Penrod) 11th. Inf., Ft. Benj. Harrison in 1941; Leo Corns, lived in Indianapolis in 1944, now believed to be in Chicago; Sgt. Richard Thompson, 125th. Inf. Reg., Camp Maxey, Texas, 1944; Pvt. Douglas Williams or Wm. Douglas, home around Eldorado, Ill., last heard from in 11th. Inf. Reg., Ft. Benj. Harrison, 1941. Any information will be appreciated by G. E. Ziegler, care of Adventure —Lost Trails.

Anyone knowing the whereabouts of Carl Hatfield, born in western Kentucky, last heard of at Hardinsburg, Kentucky, in 1939, where he was in the taxi business, please communicate with his son, Pvt. James Ralph Hatfield, 35981592, 1-2 RR, AGFRD-2, Fort Ord, California.

Karl Miller, 1522 Mary Street, Marinette, Wisconsin, wishes to hear from anyone knowing the whereabouts of David Edwin (or Edward) Rivers, age 50, last known to be at 919 Bellameade Avenue, Evansville, Indiana.

Roy H. Edman, General Delivery, Riverside, California, would like to locate the following people: H. Goodwin, his son, Reece Goodwin, or his daughters, Rebecca, Lucinda, Minnie and Naomi Goodwin, or Ruth Doyle, last heard of in Wichita Falls, Texas, in 1921.

Francis E. Northrope, Monico, Wisconsin wishes information about his brother Melvin H. Northrope, last heard of driving a bus out of Hastings, Neb. He served four years in Canadian Army and is twenty-four years old, 5 ft. 6 in. tall, weighs 100-110 lbs., blue eyes, ruddy complexion, dark brown hair. His brother is too young to handle horses and needs help running the farm.

Anyone knowing the whereabouts of Wilfred E. Schmaultz, born and raised in Chicago, Ill., last heard of residing at 84 Jackson St., San Francisco, Calif., please notify M. H. House, Box M. c/o Atlantic Refining Co., Meeteetse, Wyoming. He probably shipped in the Merchant Marine in Oct. '44.

Anyone knowing the whereabouts of John Andrew Lannan born at Summerville, P.E.I., last heard of at City Island, New York about fifteen years ago, was then engaged in ship building business and is believed to have moved to the State of Connecticut. Age about 64 years. Please communicate with his sister, Mrs. Hugh D. McClelland, St. Peter's Bay, Prince Edward Island.

Lt. Ptmn. J. L. March, V25183, Royal Canadian Navy, 20 St. Anne St., La Providence, P. Q., Canada, wants information about his father, Sydney Wilford March, whom he hasn't seen in 17 years. He was born in Portsmouth, England, came to North America in his youth, last heard of in Rochester, N. Y.

(Continued from page 91)

"Heave!" the British officer yelled, and Baxter caught a hazy glimpse of the canvas top tilting up in the fog, and the splitting crash of the loaded wagon box came to him clearly above the fretful popping of guns.

"Corporal Dale, get your squad up here," the British officer yelled mechanically, and more dust began to boil out toward the third wagon.

Steadying his carbine, Baxter fired at a flash of red coat in the dust and looked tensely up the line.

What the hell was keeping Sevier? Everything now depended on Sevier. He wiped the sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand. "A few more tipped wagons," he thought gravely, "and this would get very dirty."

He could make out nothing clearly along the bend of the road. Dust kept spurting up, getting thicker along the right of the enemy line, as the dragoons moved back toward the wagons. They were evidently throwing dust with their hands now; a sudden wave of it enveloped the third wagon.

Near him a rifleman cursed the dust bitterly and stepped forward into the clear, peering at the shrouded road.

"Keep cover!" Baxter yelled at him, and dodged forward himself through the thickening carbine fire to the creek bottom.

"You with the fowling pieces," he bawled, "keep them away from those damned wagons!"

"We can't see a thing, sir," a sergeant growled.

"You know where the wagons are, dammit! Keep those fowling pieces going."

He wiped his forehead again and saw his hand come away dirty with the drifting dust.

"Where the hell is Sevier?" he said savagely and immediately had his answer.

"Ta," said a trumpet abruptly beyond the dust clogged road. *"Tat-a-tat-ta-ta . . ."*

"Cavalry in our rear," a scared voice yelled on the road, and through the sudden startled lull of carbine fire, Baxter caught the close, urgent pound of horses at a dead run.

He stood up, his burly figure bulking clear in the moonlight above the low scrub.

"Cease firing! Prepare to rush!"

For a moment he could see nothing. The dust which hid the road from his riflemen also hid what was going on beyond the road. Yells and confused orders came out of the dust, and red coats flashed here and there in hurried, aimless movement. A thin smile pulled down one corner of Baxter's mouth.

"Maybe they wish now they hadn't raised so damn much dust," he said aloud, and saw the first of Sevier's horsemen bucketing through the fog along the road. Some of the dragoons broke for their horses; others, trapped and bewildered by the new attack, were attempting to fight. The heavy fowling pieces of the Patriot troopers were batting them down at point blank range, the muzzle flare of the depressed guns lighting up the red jackets.

Baxter held his hand straight above his head and then swept it down. "Forward!" he bawled and saw the thin line of riflemen surge out of the brush, their long bayonets at a slant.

Now he swung his left arm forward in a circling sweep.

"Cut them off from the wagons!" he shouted, and watched the men of the left sections come slanting in at a run.

A cheer from his own section jerked his head around. The firing from the road had stopped abruptly, and as he looked up he saw Sevier's horsemen, high in their saddles, whirling around the first wagons, the big sabers rising and falling in the dust. And as suddenly as that, it was over.

Sevier came out of the dust, his dragoon pistol still in his left hand, his saber in his right. "Some of them got away," he yelled, waving his hand back toward the timber.

"Pursue them as far as the timber but no farther. Round up any horses you see."

"Very well, sir," Sevier shouted, and wheeled his horse.

"Ames!" Baxter called to his section sergeant. "Get up to Lieutenant Marshall. Tell him to search those wagons and report on them. Sergeant Williams, have your section round up those wagon horses."

A flash of epaulettes beside a dead horse caught Baxter's eyes as he rode along.

"It's Major Ferguson, sir," said Corporal Cox.

The huge, black-haired major, his harsh face arrogant even in death, lay against a dead horse. A buckshot charge had caught him full in the chest and blood was staining the fine dress tunic.

"He was worth a regiment to them," Baxter said.

The tall corporal nodded. "We did ourselves a good night's work here, Captain," he murmured.

"How about the prisoners?" Baxter asked.

"They're all right, sir," a sergeant answered.

"What's the report on the wagons, Sergeant?"

"Fourteen of them are loaded with corn and rice, sir. One with military supplies. The other two are filled with hams."

"What did you say, Sergeant?" Baxter said unbelievingly.

"Ham, sir. Smoked hams."

The tight look on Baxter's face dissolved in a slow, happy smile.

The tall liaison captain came striding across the road. "By God, Captain," he said, "those men of yours are good. I've never seen such musketry in the dark."

"Why hell, Captain," Baxter said pleasantly, "we Carolina men don't consider this dark. This"—and he waved his hand slowly upward —"is a hunters' moon."

THE TRAIL AHEAD

I started writing the novel when our ship was off Cuba and finished it several months and a good many thousand nautical miles later just outside San Diego. So at least the pages are salty.

That's an excerpt from R. W. Daly's letter which accompanied the manuscript of the stirring new two-part story which begins in our March issue. And—we're happy to be able to report—the tale itself is just as salty as were the typewritten sheets! The author hasn't appeared on our contents page since he gave us the Peter Dickoe stories back in 1941. (there was a war—remember?—and writers as well as other folk had to turn from their usual professions to help fight it.) Frankly, we can't imagine a more fortunate re-embarkation on the stormy seas of civilian life after several war-years in the Navy than this sailor has made.

"CLEARED FOR ACTION"

By R. W. DALY

—tells the tale of Farmery Gosselyn, R.N., who found himself a captain in spite of himself in those stirring days when John Bull and Boney were at each other's throats and every French ship from the Mediterranean to the Caribbean was fair game for any craft that flew the White Ensign. With illustrations by Gordon Grant.

John Scott Douglas in "Jonah-Lucky" takes us out of San Diego aboard a tuna-clipper to anchor northwest of Isla Fernandina in the middle of a school of giant yellow-fin—sixty-pounders that mean money in any fisherman's pocket when they're cannery-bound. The only fly in the *Sebastian's* ointment was that she had the unluckiest guy in the world for a mate—and the most superstitious crew that ever baited up at the lookout's yell: "Tuna off the starboard quarter!" A great novelette set against an unusual background.

And Philip José Farmer in "O'Brien and Obrenov" tells the hilarious saga of an American officer and his Russian confrere whose respective troops had the ungrateful task of sharing the occupation of the same German town. It was the misfortune of both that Schutzmiller, that arch-Nazi, had to be captured where their zones of authority joined, and a lucky thing for both that even though they wore different uniforms they were drinking-brothers under the skin.

Plus additional fine stories by Jim Kjelgaard, Donald Barr Chidsey, and others. The stirring conclusion of Alfred Powers' "Chains for Columbus." And the usual interesting assortment of fact features, departments and verse you can expect to find each month only in—

On Sale February 8th

(Continued from page 45)

Buck was hanged on a Friday morning. That afternoon I lifted Old Charlie's latch and found him toasting his shoes on the rusty fender of his pot-bellied stove. The jug of elderberry was at his elbow and he almost looked happy.

"Well," I greeted him, "Buck paid this morning for braining Joe Anders."

Charlie shook his head. "Nope," he said, "he paid for Jeanie, an' for beatin' them kids! "

He got up and walked around the stove, reached up and took a bent eight-foot pole from the spike horns nailed to the wall.

It was an ash sapling, such as pulpwood haulers use for a boom to tighten their logs to the pung by sliding the butt through the slack of the binding chain in the middle of the load. They bend the boom until the chain is tight, then rope the bowed end to a rear stake of the pung.

Charlie rolled the pole slowly in his hands. "I made you a promise when you wanted it," he said. "I kept it, too. Now I'm askin' you to promise me somethin'."

His hard old eyes drilled me. I nodded.

"Then keep this under your hat," he said flatly. "I saved this boom of Joe's to show you. Then I'll make stove wood of it."

I felt my scalp tingle as I stared at the warped pole. The wrist-thick butt was chain-scarred, and bits of bright yarn, like the kind Mrs. Anders used to knit into socks and caps for Joe, clung to the rough bark at the tapered end.

I eyed Charlie. He nodded. "Joe never knew what hit him. An ash boom like this packs one hell of a wallop!"

I still didn't get it. "You mean Buck hit him with that pole?"

Charlie shook his head. "Buck prob'ly told the truth at his trial, for once in his life. The pung an' team passed *over* Buck's tracks. He prob'ly crossed the trail quite a spell 'fore Joe came along."

"Then how in the devil—"

"Remember that thank-ye-ma'am where we found Joe?"

I nodded again. Charlie laid the boom on the woodpile beside the stove and went back to the spike horns. He took down two short coils of half-inch rope and held the ends together.

"See this?" They fitted neatly; no frayed strands.

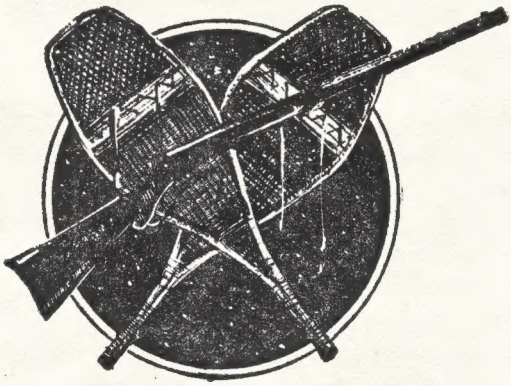
"Joe always was careless where he stuck that double-bitted axe of his," he explained. "Damn dangerous stickin' up in a top log thataway. This time he must've hitched his boom rope above it, an' when his pung hit that bump at the thank-ye-ma'am, the rope slapped down on the upper blade."

I got it then, with a jolt that struck me dumb! I didn't need any more to complete the picture; but Charlie went on, spacing his words like a hungry hobo spooning soup. "Joe used to brag about shavin' with that axe. Kept both edges whetted with a razor hone. Well, you can see how it went through this rope, like you'd snip a whisker; an' the freed end of the boom whanged around an' bashed the back of his head in!"

I glared at the old cuss until my throat relaxed enough to squeak, "And you knew this all the time, and let Buck stand trial?"

It was then that he smiled the second time.

"I promised you I wouldn't interfere with the Law!"



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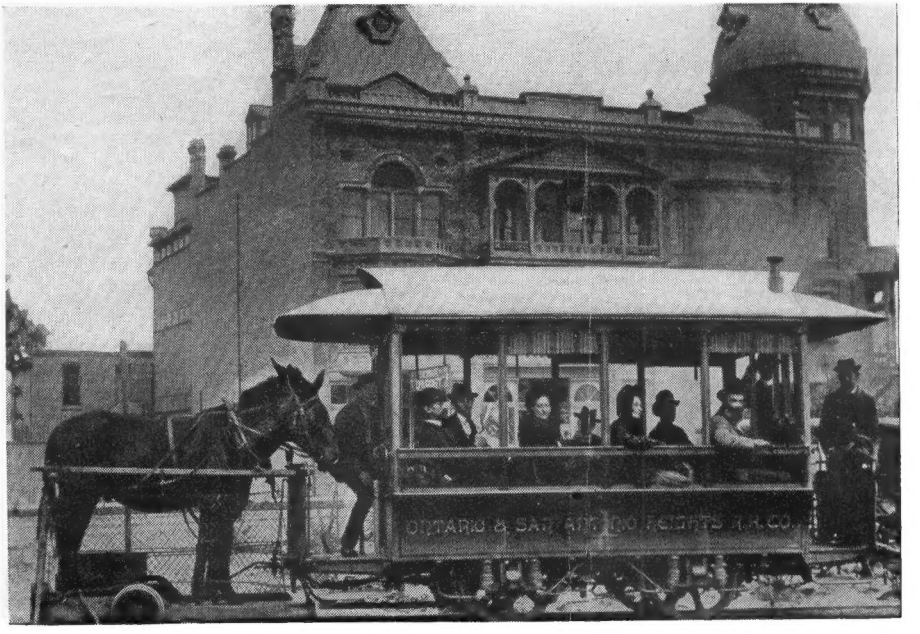

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